

STUDIES AND APPRECIATIONS

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BY
DARRELL FIGGIS



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To
G. K. CHESTERTON

SUBJECT: Yellow Sea

CONTENTS

	PAGE
AFTERTHOUGHTS	1
IN PRAISE OF PRAISE	17
. M. SYNGE	23
THE ART OF J. M. SYNGE	34
ROBERT BROWNING'S VISION	60
FALSTAFF'S NOSE	89
THE PROBLEM OF MR. WILLIAM WATSON	194
MR. W. B. YEATS' POETRY	119
MR. WILLIAM H. DAVIES	138
MR. HERBERT TRENCH	148
MR. ROBERT BRIDGES	155
GEORGE MEREDITH: THE PHILOSOPHER IN THE ARTIST	169
CHARLES DICKENS AND THE NOVEL	199
THE FAILURE OF THACKERAY	222
AN ASPECT OF SAMUEL BUTLER	234
THE VITALITY OF DRAMA	240

STUDIES AND APPRECIATIONS

AFTERTHOUGHTS

ONE must always, it seems, look back upon one's work with a curious mixture of hostility and clandestine affection. Particularly is this the case when, as in these random studies, it has been done within a limited space, having in mind some or other definite end that was to be served. Everything is conditioned by the aim it serves, a fact that literary criticism is too often pleased to forget; but when, as in the case of these studies, that aim is definite and articulate, it is inevitable that one's afterthoughts should be prolific of qualifications of the statements made, and adjustments of the points of view taken. Speech is the noblest attribute of man; yet it is a humiliating consideration that even in so noble a function it is impossible for him to arrive at truth. Every statement is a lie, for every statement is a preclusion. Yet the colourless balance between two emphases is a deeper kind of a lie still, for it says nothing when perhaps something should be said. It adds cowardice to falsehood. It is not by the

exclusion of emphasis that truth may be arrived at, but by the inclusion of a variety of emphasis. Nor is this only in order that one emphasis may qualify another emphasis, but rather that one emphasis may coalesce with another emphasis, and so, truth meeting with truth, the Temple of Beauty may be seen shining in a whiteness compounded of all colours, dimly through the mists of earth.

One turns to past examples of literary criticism for curious and contradictory instances of this. When Jeffreys, for instance, cried out on Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "This will never do!" there is probably no lover of poetry who does not believe that he thereby damned himself as any kind of a judge on the matter. And yet, in a sense, he was right. For there is no one who will claim that *The Excursion* fulfils all the demands of poetry; and if Jeffreys chose to take his stand on just those demands that it did not fulfil, he was so far justified in saying it would never do. The perversity of the man may not be commendable; but, given his perversity, he was right enough. What he did not see, and what literary critics never yet have succeeded in seeing, is that no poem fulfils all the demands of poetry; and if one choose to stand on just those particular demands it has failed to fulfil, it would be possible to dismiss as summarily any poem in the world. When a poem or

a poet has won his rank and authority it may possibly be desirable then to take such a stand momentarily, as a passing discipline, in order not to have one's vision bounded by a single view: though even then it would demand imperative reasons to justify it. But, in the main, no poem can be made to yield any beauty till its own point of view has been conceded and taken.

" And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love,"

sings Wordsworth of the poet. For it is true, as some one has said, that there was never yet a secret told to them that knew it not before. A critical attitude towards any unveiling of beauty is enough to dismiss and destroy it for ever: though it yet remains beautiful despite the fact that the critic has cancelled his sight of its beauty. It is not for nothing that all the great schools of initiation have proceeded on the basis of fearlessness, acceptance, and humility; and it is not for nothing that the portals to every great religion have been inscribed with the word Faith.

This is the supreme value of Art. It not only accepts and rejoices in this great discipline—for any work of art is an irrevocable act of faith: it unfolds some aspect of the central beauty that is more than all aspects. That is to say, each work of art is in

itself a kind of synthesis. It not only defies the search of analysis, but, in itself, it offers a broader front than any one appreciation of it. It is true to say that criticism, strictly as such, can never be of any final value, and that appreciation is the only way of discovery; but it is also true that appreciation itself may only lay emphasis on one of many possible aspects. What that aspect may be will depend on the point of view that occasion or inclination has decreed. But in laying such an emphasis it will appear to diminish, or obviate, other points of view; and so, when the occasion or inclination has passed, it will look like a falsehood: true in itself, maybe, but a falsehood by contrast. Art, and chiefly Poetic Art, in its magnificent patience or its splendid passion, is content to create out of the central stuff of Beauty, and to forbear from judgments. But appreciation must be content to run to and fro, and speak of what it sees from its many points of view.

Consequently, when this has happened, when such an occasion has passed, certain changes have occurred in one that make it impossible to recover the old mood, or to see how another might regard a certain emphasis on coming to it for the first time. Though we agree with every word that has been written, in having advanced to newer points of view the old

essay looks wayworn. It looks wayworn because that is truly what it is: it is wayworn! it is the way by which one has come to a richer understanding.

Or, to descend to the particular, it may be that changes have happened, not only in oneself, but in the general attitude toward one's subject. This is more or less true with regard to the essay on "The Art of J. M. Synge," that originally appeared in England in the *Fortnightly Review* and in America in the *Forum*. When I wrote it there was not, to my knowledge, any full-length appreciation of his work. It was only a short while ago; nevertheless, since then a chorus of indiscriminate praise has arisen that I cannot agree with. To my own personal thought, for a very considerable stretch of years there have been two dramatists pre-eminently that stand out from the ruck of mere journeyman work: Ibsen for breadth and scope, Synge for sheer beauty. Yet, if there is one thing more than another noticeable in Synge's work, it is his small and limited field. And this, in drama especially, is a considerable detraction. It is not small only in its final achievement: it is small also within that achievement, since there is a certain sameness running through it. There is also a character of unhealthiness in it that it would be unwise to neglect. The beauty is as indisputable as it is rare: but it also is somewhat hectic. The

vigour, too, is the vigour of unhealthiness: it is brutal; it is bitter.

To be true, I have not in my essay inferred the contrary of this. But the words in which I spoke are much like the words in which others are speaking; and I do not mean all they mean. Very likely it is I who am wrong: I only wish to define my attitude more clearly for those who may read my essay. Where we are at one is in wonderment at those who have attacked Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. The attack has proceeded in all sincerity; and, ostensibly at least, from the worthiest of motives. It has been said that Synge vilified Ireland in the play. That, if true, would be a serious charge. To vilify that dear land, among the few places in Europe where vision is alive and where the people consequently do not perish in herds and factories, might be forgivable in a foreigner, but scarcely in a man like Synge, in whose veins the blood was Irish. But it is interesting to discover that the charge has proceeded on the basis of a well-worn artistic heresy. An artist is under no tribute to people his art with other than the creatures of his own brain. He does not reproduce the semblance that some society at some moment has come to wear. Indeed, it may happen that, if that semblance be an unhappy or an unworthy one, he may remind it of its forgotten

greatness; for the measure of his own greatness is his kinship with those diviner elements, and his power to create of them "forms more real than living man." Shakespeare did not vilify England by the creation of Justice Shallow any more than he flattered her by the creation of Cordelia. He merely peopled his art, and the test of the result was not to be found in England but in Shakespeare. So with Synge. To say that Pegeen Mike is somewhat uncannily brutal, or Christy Mahon vividly sensuous, is not to say that Synge vilified Ireland, but that, as I have suggested, his passion was somewhat hectic, as his vigour was brutal. Which is quite a different thing. Naturally he had to abide by the exaction on every creator, and find a local habitation for his creations, even as there was one quarter of the earth that fed him with the elements of human nature nearest to those most apt to spring from his own brain and blood. Paris could not do this; Ireland did: and Ireland should be more proud of one of her sons who has succeeded in creating an art that was beautiful, despite its hectic flush, instead of being stirred to anger because some short-sighted critic mistakes that hectic flush for her own.

With regard to the essay on "Robert Browning's Vision:" this was written as a centenary notice for the *English Review* in England and the *North*

American Review in America. Its occasion, not to say its prescribed scope, naturally set out its limitations; yet I was considerably surprised when some of its critics, in England, complained that I did not mention the difficulties that attend the reading of Browning. I could mention a variety of things that I did not mention in the essay. As I have hinted, it is an unfortunate limitation of speech that a man can only say one thing at a time. Yet it had been my chief desire to solve the central difficulty of Browning's poetry so far as I might. It is always unwise to bring theories to Life or Literature: yet it seems to me that there is always some central room in a man's house of art which, if we can reach, will make all the dwelling stand around us in order and in harmony, and with a manifest purpose. It was this that I sought to reach in the case of Browning. Why, I asked, did this man always speak through the lips of men and women when it was clear, from the general nature of his choices among them, and the words they spake, that his chief interest was not in any mere objective presentation of character, but in subjective intimations of wisdom? Why was it that one could pick out so many sayings of his men and women, that were vividly characteristic of them, but of which one could affirm positively that they were Browning's triumphant finding of his own philosophy: sayings,

for example, of Abt Vogler, of the Rabbi ben Ezra, of Cleon, Karshish, Andrea del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi, Pictor Ignotus, and a hundred others, including such as Sludge and Blougram? On the mention of any of his poems depicting such characters, one could almost inevitably recall the lines that were its pivot and cause of being; and these would almost inevitably echo Browning's own faith. Obviously there was a reason for this. Such a man was clearly not concerned in character for its own sake, even though he thought this of himself. I remembered that, always, my difficulty in reading Browning was having to enter into so many different characters with apparently so small a purpose. It seemed so capricious; and I used to wish, with his wife, that he would sing out of his own person—though my adjurations to that end were not quite so seemly as hers doubtless were. It was like wandering in a labyrinth. Then, as I worked to and fro, suddenly I struck on what seemed to me the cause; and I remember what an illumination it flooded through my mind. Each character-study seemed of fresh and separate value. Each passage seemed to lead to one spacious and central hall. As I read, my being thrived (as it is the intent of Literature that Being should thrive thereby) where it had only been puzzled before. And consequently, inasmuch as men who write are not in the habit of

considering themselves as beneath the average intelligence, judging that what had meant illumination to me might bring the same to others, and seeing it had not been said before, I worked it out in an essay. Obviously, therefore, it lay outside its scope to deal with those other, incidental, difficulties that were part of the haste of the man to glean the heavy harvest that lay in his fee.

In "Falstaff's Nose" I struck somewhat fiercely perhaps. Yet perhaps it needs some striking to loosen a stone, false to the structure, inserted nearly two centuries ago. A certain poet, once in my hearing, argued the interesting proposition that poets should be at liberty to amend an earlier brother's faults, and to improve and refurbish his lines considerably. Yet I think that even he would object to a learned editor exercising this privilege.

All the essays on poets writing and living at the present time, together with some others that I have not wished to call up from the shades, appeared in a series that I wrote on "Some Living Poets." The series ended abruptly; but a number of people, kindly disposed, and strangers to me, wrote to me asking that they should be collected together in a volume. It is always a hazardous proceeding to criticise contemporaries; nor is it always desirable; but this counsel is often turned from one of wisdom

to one of mere fear. It does not seem altogether a desirable state of affairs when we find men who profess themselves lovers of Poetry, and who write freely in praise of poets of the past, however small, refusing altogether to read, or write upon, contemporary poetry. Theirs can scarcely be called a robust faith.

The lecture on "Meredith: the Philosopher in the Artist," wears the oldest date of all the inclusions in the volume. It was delivered as a lecture after a feat that was also a splendid adventure. For I had just read through Meredith, work by work, prose and poetry, in chronological order of writing. It was like living through another man's life, living through his growth of power and thought, and finding the same wonder in the coming of wisdom. It was altogether thrilling. I remember one stormy morning climbing the "Wetterhorn," as we mounted through the clouds in the growing light of the dawn, how peak was added to peak as we climbed higher, and with what a thrill each rose-gold crest rose into recognition until the wide cloistral fraternity stretched in multitudinous array, as it were, to the shores of infinity, and the whole high scene was mapped in the sunlight at one's feet. It was an exquisite moment. Yet the task was not more arduous, nor the recompense more vivid than in ascending

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the peaks of thought with a mental athlete like Meredith.

Apart from the personal changes one noticed stealthily coming on oneself (changes, in the main, of small interest to others), even to the poise of carriage or to a tone of voice, the thing that was most impressive was the perception of the organic unity of Meredith's thought. I use the word organic, because it grew upon itself, branched out and throve. The characters had a wonderful interest in themselves; but they seemed to take a new interest as evidences of their creator's mental progress. Nesta Victoria stood over against Lucy Feverel with an altogether new meaning, and Sandra-Vittoria stood midway between them as illustrative of the progress from one to the other. It was even more so with regard to those "background characters" of which I speak in the lecture; those men who, in the novels, seem somehow to bear Meredith's banner in the fray; his "choruses," as most creators have their choruses. Austin Wentworth, thin of blood, can be seen giving place to Merthyr Powys, who has richer veins without the spontaneity these should give his mind; to him succeeds Major Percy Waring, where the blood becomes more spontaneous, and Austin Wentworth, where the mind takes an added graciousness; then comes Tom Redworth, staunch and strong, full of

blood and firm in its control, yet lacking the nerve and culture of refinement; a clear stepping-stone to Dartrey Fenellan, who, in his quick blood, steady nerves, and strong brain, has all these attributes in spontaneity of manhood, and Matthew Weyburn, who would have them too, with meditation and reflective wisdom moreover, save for the difficulty of being one of the supporters of a necessary plot, as his brothers were not.

It was no fancied conceit: it grew upon one's thought as one read, or came ever and again with a shock of surprise. And when, with this slow and steady growth, one read the poetry that lay beside it, and expounded the philosophy (if one may use this word after its corruption at the hands of system-mongers) that was exemplified in that growth, it was impossible to resist the conclusion that they were two different impressions of the same thing. Consequently I set out to expound for myself this philosophy that appeared to mean so much. That it is far, very far, from all, I am only too well aware.

The essays on Thackeray and Dickens were both centenary notices. In each I strove to reach the central note that should elucidate the perplexing in each writer. How a man of wonderful gifts and

abilities should have failed to give that ring of passion that makes enduring characterisation, and why we should always be fascinated by the memory of characters that we learn are mere examples of grotesquerie, were the problems I set out to answer in each case.

It has been particularly interesting to me to notice the coincidence that all the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw that I have seen staged since I wrote "The Vitality of Drama" have been acted as farce, not as comedy as had previously been the custom. And one of the most curious results of this has been that Mr. Shaw has become, by that fact, a popular dramatist, earning continuous runs from six months to a year in London, instead of being the playwright of a select, and elect, minority. His drama is farce with a meaning in it; but it is farce nevertheless. Even the wit takes a further value from the farcical postulate—as, for example, that of a butler in a middle-class house who is a peer in disguise—and that which is not wit often wears such an appearance for the same reason. It is, in fact, intellectual farce; and since no man can deny his predecessors, however he may try, it sprang very clearly from a very unhealthy state of affairs in the theatre that Mr. Shaw attempted to correct; and which, indeed, he did correct, in his own way.

When I wrote the article I was taken mildly to task for saying that the basis of drama is words. And when, more recently, in a study of Shakespeare, I repeated this, I was taken much more severely to task, and in mightier quarters, incurring, indeed, the added penalty of having other and more heinous charges raised against me with regard to other portions of the book, as a kind of final flagellation. Let it rest so. I have only to ask if *Hamlet*, or *Prometheus Bound*, or *Ædipus* be drama? If they be, and if one were to blot out all the words that built them, it would be interesting to discover how much of drama in them would be left. It may well be that if one were to "refer to the derivation of the word Drama" one would "find it to be Action and not the Word." But what precisely the derivation (actual, not dictionary) of the Action is, if not the Word, does not appear. Even if the action were to be conveyed in dumb-show, how is the interpreter to have the value of the action conveyed to him apart from words? Otherwise, and if the action were a violent one, there might be reprisals. Indeed, one would scarcely heed the objection except that the objector were so justly distinguished a person as Mr. Gordon Craig.

In conclusion I have to thank the editors of the

Bookman, the *English Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Forum*, and the *North American Review*, the *Academy*, the *New Age*, and the *Nation*, for their courtesy in permitting me to reprint these various essays.

DARRELL FIGGIS.

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IN PRAISE OF PRAISE

WITHOUT contradiction, great is the praise of praise. It, like mercy, is a quality quick and keen to bless both giver and receiver. Moreover, it is a proof in both giver and receiver of royalty in the blood. For it is not possible that a criminal should praise: he may applaud, but he cannot praise, seeing that the function of praise is something that the whole heart is participant in, whereas the criminal is a house divided against itself, his conscience against his purpose, and his purpose against his conscience. Yet perhaps even a criminal may praise. But he cannot praise crime. To praise, he must praise with his whole being; he must take rank with his conscience; and thereby he becomes no more a criminal, but a man of splendour. The deed is his accolade of royalty.

You may tell the man of splendour by his capacity for praise, even as you may tell the age of splendour by its capacity for praise. It is a kind of touchstone. There are, for instance, certain men at whom History stands in perplexity; and at whom History must continue to stand perplexed until this touchstone has been brought forward to resolve the perplexity.

You may admire Robespierre; you may stand in wonder of his genius; you may see him thrust his way from obscurity to an unrivalled dictatorship, and hold, frail and unlovely though he be, a whole fair France in fear of his slightest nod; and it may stir your blood. Similarly, you may question the real greatness of Mirabeau; you may think him after all but a charlatan, a mimicker of greatness, a mock prophet tricked out in robes the like of which he had seen elsewhere, and had had carefully copied. You may think all this, and yet you will have a sneaking regard for Mirabeau, even as you turn from Robespierre as you would from a very beautifully coloured toad. Then you will have it brought to your mind that Mirabeau must have been able to praise, a big, open, whole-hearted, generous praise, if occasion demanded it, even though no single instance arose to your mind of his having done so; and you would dare wager with any that Robespierre could not so have praised, that his approval must needs have been a poor, watery, grudging kind of plaudit, while he pulled his spectacles down from his forehead to scan your intentions carefully: when the whole perplexity will at once stand resolved to you, and you will take your rank with the charlatan, were he charlatan never so much, and against the man of the Mountain.

And tell me, will you, when was Rare Ben Jonson the better man: when he wrote *Sejanus*, or when he wrote of the man who had been his great rival in drama, who had defied all rules and principles of Art, such rules and principles as he had laid down magisterially at the *Mermæid*, and who probably had compelled him to leave writing for the "Globe" or cease his dramatic brawling, that "he loved the man, and did honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any"?—that "he was not for an age, but for all time"?—that he was the "Soul of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!" Nay, how did Ben earn the epithet of "rare"? Was it because of his Book? Was it because he laid down the law heavily of a night, and through to many a merry morn, at the Mermaid? Tyrants are not wont to be dubbed rare. Or was it because he had a soul large enough to praise?

You will say, perhaps, that Ben could blame and blame mightily. True; but then it takes a man who can praise to blame. Nay, a man who cannot praise should never on any account be entrusted with the instrument of blame, for he will not use it properly; he will not blame; he will be merely and weakly censorious, irritably censorious: and a censor is not a blamer. A censor is to a blamer as a sycophant is to a praiser. You must have

standards of differentiation for the one; you need have none for the other. To blame is to detect blemishes. Ben once detected a blemish to such good effect that Shakespeare was constrained to alter the line accordingly. And therefore blame, like praise, which is its obverse, is a wise function. There was probably never blame that did not imply praise. Once there was a young man who wrote a long poem—which was no ill thing to do—but he wrote it in an age of censors, and in that he was unfortunate. He called his poem *Endymion*, and he was told to “go back to the shop, Mr. John. Stick to plasters, pills, and ointment boxes.” There has been much good ink used in discussing whether or not a certain fretfulness was induced in Keats as a result of this, weakening him for the scourges of phthisis, and leaving us a decapitated poetry. But it must ever remain a matter of speculation as to what would have happened to him had he fallen into an age of good praisers, who would have hailed him royally, without omitting to point out those blemishes, those vulgarities and immitigable crudities, that he himself declared he was not unaware of.

For there is a deep principle in this: a principle of life. It is possible to save a soul by praise when no other method could avail. You could raise an age of giants by praise. There is an ancient belief

—that is yet not so ancient—that we grow round our names like peas round a stick: that to call a boy “Bob” from his youth up would make him quite a different man from the probable product had you ever hailed him as “Robert.” There is another superstition, which is no superstition, that if you see a friend pale and ill, you may send him to the grave by advising him of the fact, whereas you may save him by proclaiming his robust appearance. So it is with praise. Praise, as has been said, is a wise function; you cannot praise something that is not there; you could not have praised Keats because his poetry was robust and manly. The good praiser would have seen with native perception just what his poetry held worthy of praise, knowing that no man would have published an ambitious book without something worthy of praise in it; and he would have praised that royally. He would have known that no ill could have come of this; that, indeed, no ill can ever come of praise; but that the receiver would have burgeoned to the quality praised in him, filling out its proportions, and coming indeed actually to be the thing he was acclaimed for being, like a boy to the sound of his name. Yes, you could raise an age of giants by praise.

Instead of which, you will hear it said that praise is forbidden, inasmuch as its avowal would make its

receiver egoistic. Just as though it were not good to be egoistic? Just as though the salt of the earth were not a healthy egoism! Where, in the name of conscience, will you find a virtue that is not egoistic, that is not the assertion of an abundant personality? Men were automaton^s else: frigid things, mechanical things, not splendid and urgent things. Praise itself is egoistic.* Look you, the man who will not praise is the man who is not sure of himself, who is so little convinced of his own greatness that he will withhold the thought of that attribute from others for fear lest they outshine and out-distance him. The man who will not praise has never possessed his own soul. He has never risen to the splendour of confidence in himself, and so, instead of royally acclaiming others in a spirit of frank equality, he will be found for ever fortifying himself and his little prowess by the twin agencies of censure and sycophancy. And therefore praise is not only the acclaimer of greatness; it is not only the creator of greatness; it is the proof of greatness in a man. You may know the little man by a sign; it is stamped on his speech. He will be for ever saying that praise is a good thing, and a necessary thing, but that he has not yet found anything in his age and generation worthy of his praise. That is to say, that though you could raise an age of giants by praise, it would take an age of giants to do it.

J. M. SYNGE

IT was given to John Millington Synge to achieve one of the supreme paradoxes of literature. . He was, of course, not the only one. ' There was Shakespeare. Of them both it is possible to hear on the one hand that they are the complete expression of their several national spirits, and on the other that they are not national at all, but cosmopolitan and remote. Whereas in fact the truth is that they express their national spirits so completely and finally that they lift them out of the national into the international. They are not hedged by their boundaries, for they are so lofty that they can more readily see each other than the limits of the countries in which they stand. Yet the fact remains that they do indeed really stand in their several countries, and derive their sustenance—not merely their physical, but rather now their artistic, sustenance—from the national earth in which their feet are planted. . They speak in the cosmopolitan upper air; but their emotions come from the red national earth that bred them. It is their stature that makes the paradox.

J. M. Synge himself in figure and temperament suggested the intense, brooding, imaginative, and

sensitive Irish spirit. He was born in 1871 in Rathfarnham, Co., Galway, the youngest son of John Hatch Synge, barrister-at-law, and the owner of some landed property in that county. Tutored for Trinity College, Dublin, he entered there in 1888, graduated there four years later, taking prizes in Hebrew and Gaelic in the interim. Music, too, engaged his attention; and since in the year prior to his graduation he had taken a scholarship in Harmony, he passed, in 1893, to Germany to continue his studies there. But though music in later hours was to unlock secrets for him in the Isles of Aran and Blasket, it ceased to enthrall him now; and in 1895 he was in Paris, seeking to qualify himself for literary criticism with a thoroughness characteristic of him.

Yet, though he leaned thus toward literary expression, the creative impulse was then hardly awake in him. The few poems that mark this time are not so much characteristic of him as they are symptomatic of the language that marks a certain type of French poetry. It needed the word spoken into him to awaken the impulse to creation: and that word could not be spoken in Paris. Like all great souls he was paradoxical in all things. He was a silent man because he was full of speech. Thus, too, he wandered Europe because he could be at home

only in Ireland. He might have achieved criticism in Paris, because criticism is an aloof function that sees life from without, through literature: he could only have risen to the spontaneity of creation where his soul was attuned to life itself, and this could not have been in alien Paris. Nor had his brooding soul the energy to discover this for himself.

It was discovered for him by a divine chance. And it was discovered, appropriately enough, by one who with him stands out and above the earnest band that has determined to raise Ireland again to dignity in European literature. During a visit to Paris in 1899, W. B. Yeats stayed, where he and a number of other Irishmen were wont to stay, at a little hotel in the Rue Corneille, opposite the Odéon Théâtre. He here heard of an Irishman who, "even poorer than myself, had taken a room at the top of the house. It was J. M. Synge, and I, who thought I knew the name of every Irishman who was working at literature, had never heard of him." Seeing the man, noting his preoccupation with a literature that had already become obsessed with itself, remote from the warm pulse of life, perceiving, too, how truly he was kin to the soul of Ireland, he bade him leave all these literary forms and expressions, and go to the Aran Islands up the bay of Galway, that "to express a life that has never found expression."

It was a divine chance: it was, indeed, divination: more so than Yeats could ever have been aware of at the time he spoke. For Synge went to Aran; he left his wanderings over Italy, France, and Germany; and went to Aran, spending large portions of the following few years there. And he wrote of Aran. Or rather, Aran spoke through him; for in reading his account of his life there, we do not so much hear a man speaking of the externals of topography, manner of life, and the like, as the soul of a people speaking through the writer, brushing aside, or greatly assuming, those superficial aspects that the inquisitive eye would seek to be informed of. In fine, a manner of creation was already proceeding: impulsion and the act of writing were springing to spontaneity: intensity of life was speaking through intensity of thought. In Paris he essayed to be a critic of a literature that was already becoming decadent. In Inishmaan and Aranmore he was the living voice of a people that had kept its original awe and native purity truer than any other people in Europe. And this is the more remarkable, because he speaks in his book of not understanding the people, of feeling strangely aloof and alien to them. It was, in fact, because he passed so into their life that he felt he understood them so little, even as a man himself least knows the aspect of his own face. His

intense identity with them blotted out the critic in him. Yet he was not of them; for he had a voice, and they had not.

It was at this time that he was caught up in the dramatic movement that was stirring to life in Dublin. It was, at least, singular that creation should be stirring in him while the vent for it was stirring in Dublin. Even such strange chances is it, giving the colour of divinity to life, that wake words of wonder on men's lips, such as Hamlet's startled observation. Yet, though he was caught up in it, he was the servant of no movement. He did not create it, as Yeats may be said largely to have created it; nor did it create him, as it has created others. He preserved his detachment by the imperious lonely instinct of his soul, brooding on all things, yet subservient to none; and, though it does not appear to be so at first flush, he really expressed the movement better by his detachment than he could have done had he been its servant, even as he expressed the Irish spirit better because he was an artist, and therefore knew how to select and arrange.

He even brought it to something that was external to it. For the inception of the movement largely arose from a preoccupation with the ancient literature and mythology of Ireland: whereas he came with something of a contempt for the aerial figures

that meant so much to Mr. Yeats, for example, and A. E. They were engaged deeply and earnestly with Angus, Maeve, and Fand, the "plumed yet skinny Shee." He came from a people living on bare, stern rocks, set in a wild tempestuous sea, at war with Time, Wind, and Tide; men hardened to sudden death and wild sorrow; men who had small place for the phantasies of literature, though their lives brimmed and quivered with psychic wonder and adventure, and who knew how to drink deep and live hardily. Love was to him, as to them, not a romance, but a mating; and life was more tragic than tragedy, for there was no elation in it.

Coming thus, though he remained largely aloof from the initial spirit of the movement, he brought a strong earthy flavour into it that moved and bent the spirit of his fellow-workers to itself. Any who compare Yeats' early *Countess Cathleen* with his late *Green Helmet* may see this for themselves. "On the stage one must have reality," he wrote later in the introduction to *The Playboy*; and he brought reality. He came with two plays: *In the Shadow of the Glen*, a dramatisation of a story he had heard told on Inishmaan, with subtle and delicate alterations in it eminently characteristic of the man; and *Riders to the Sea*, a tragedy, or perhaps, rather, a tragic episode, whose site is pitched in Aran. He

came also with a speech that was the music of the language spoken in the West of Ireland, rendered in smoother and mightier harmonies. How truly this speech was the speech of actuality can be heard by any who know its harmonies and have heard the speech in any old shebeen in Galway! What process of selection and arrangement went forward let the following example show. This is how an old man in the Aran Islands warned him against bachelordom:

"Listen to what I'm telling you: a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass. He goes into his sister's house, and into his brother's house; he eats a bit in this place and a bit in another, but he has no home for himself: like an old jackass straying on the rocks."

This is the first process as memory achieves it. It has not the music of high dramatic speech; but it has a rare cadence and charm in its truly colloquial flavour, the sap of life flowing in it, that await only the transmuting touch to swell into great music. And this is how Michael James speaks in *The Playboy of the Western World*:

"What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks?"

A quiet elimination of much, a calm compactness of the remainder, a suggestion of antithesis in food and drink, a swelling of the movement with an open-vowelled adjective and the clean music of a perfect

tense in the verb: these are the hints of the mind that worked, but it was mind that wrought the miracle, scarce knowing what it did. It was even so the knocking of a neighbour stirred Beethoven to the wonder of his one Violin Concerto. Yet, while the process can be traced in this certain instance, it moved in the same way, calmly and unostentatiously, in aloof rumination, through the speech of all his characters, in varying degree, till it broke into magnificent flower with Christy Mahon as he discovers the power resident so long in him unsuspected of himself. It was the music of the West of Ireland, even though the West of Ireland could not see it, that spoke through Deirdre as she braced herself to her death:

"I see the trees naked and bare, and the moon shining. Little moon, little moon of Alban, it's lonesome you'll be this night, and to-morrow night, and the long nights after, and you pacing the woods of Glen Laoi, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the two lovers who slept so sweetly with each other."

Speech being the highest function of man, to say of a man that he has found speech is to say that he has found himself, that he has found his soul—speech being clearly understood as speech, and not as talk. It was so with Synge. He became a director of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. He became perhaps its most important, certainly its most debated dramatist. All his previous years seemed an earnest preparation to

this end, whether roving Europe or furling his soul about with one of the strange still nights in Aran till he became so much a part of the scene that he seemed to exist only in perception. Play followed play with unhasting deliberation. The desolation and loneliness of *In the Shadow of the Glen* led to the wild, fateful *Riders to the Sea*. In one was seen rebellion against the shackles of monotony, a rebellion that began with Nora joining speech with Patch Darcy as he passed up and down the lonely road near which their cabin lay, and concluding, even against herself, with her going out with the tramp to hear the "herons crying out over the black lakes," and the "grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the day is warm." In the other the soul of a mother set against a tragic and warring Nature, till with her last son taken she turns to a consolation that is more terrible than tears: "No man can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied." In both is heard the speech waked in him; and in both is seen the finished craftsmanship learned in Paris.

Humour took him for awhile then. But it was a strange humour. It became boisterous in *The Tinker's Wedding*; it turned shrewdly sardonical, with one exquisite flower of tenderness, in *The Well of the Saints*. And humour still hung about him

when he set his hand to *The Playboy of the Western World*, for it is conceived in the spirit of humour, though it passes to something that is not humour nor grief, but the poise of both. If *Riders to the Sea* be his most perfect gem, wrought with a skill that matches its poignancy, the *Playboy* is his best and completest expression. In it, as in all his plays, he brushes past externals and in a few strokes is in business with souls. In *The Playboy* it is the soul of a youth, stepping to manhood, long shackled, estimated as worthless, and accepting the estimate, but now learning his powers of greatness in the heroic estimate of others. He burgeons and expands in the sunshine of their awe of him, and in the process of burgeoning breaks to perfect flower of speech. It is of a soul that he again treats in the play he was yet working at when he died, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. It is the soul of a woman who learns with horror that love may end, and who chooses death for herself and her lover, rather than so bitter and sordid an experience. She takes death in the full heyday of the soul, before it should shrink and shrivel at the touch of Time.

It was strange, and yet not strange, that he who should have won such rich music out of his prose should have failed so utterly in poetry. There is often incision, and frequently pungency, in his verse; but there is not music. He did not leave much verse.

In truth, he did not leave any substantial body of work, for he was a fastidious and painstaking craftsman, and he was not given many years to work in, dying on March 24, 1909. He had hoped to break new ground of toil. Instead, like his Deirdre, he went to death in the full heyday of his power; and his art remains to us as the enduring expression of his spirit.

THE ART OF J. M. SYNGE

THERE is a fashion of scenery in the West of Ireland of a kind peculiarly apart. A road, maybe, will be running like an irregular ribbon of grey over a desolate scene, losing itself in a grey horizon, threading its journey painfully enough through a landscape of brown forbidding bog. Even to the very margin of the road will the bog encroach, making the journey seem as though it were poised over abysms. Not a tree stabs the skyline, or lends distinction to the landscape. Where the turf has been cut away, brown puddles gleam purple as they reflect the sweeping mists and clouds. If there is a habitation of man in sight it will not relieve the brooding passion of the scene. A cottage of stone at best, with an enclosure of coal-black soil furrowed for seed and hardly won from the morass, it falls into the formless unity of the universe. Such a scene has no distinction, yet it is passionate with temperament. It holds out no details for the eye to fasten on. It is one large, brooding gesture of magnificence, psychic and strange. The very hills are merged in the gesture. One could imagine it rising to a very fury of energy, but that it does not do so.

Such is his country; such was the man John Millington Synge; and of such a sort was his work, for, do what he will, a man cannot make his work other than an effluence of himself. He was a man in whom the very energy of thought turned to brooding, even as in his work the very energy of dramatic instinct achieved results that evade the more obvious meanings of the word dramatic. He was of a type of Irishman that, though pronounced enough in the race, has received but little heed in a day that clutches for the obvious. His very furling himself in undemonstrative emotion was the cry of greatness that sought a friendship that could not be granted it. That he was a peaceful man did not belie the earnestness of his Nationalist conviction: it flowed from the very strength of it. His resolution raised him above demonstration. There was something of a contempt for the opposite side in it infinitely more scorching than a fury of words. If greatness be magnificence rather than eccentricity, he was supremely great. Like the landscapes he strode over, not in the manner of an alien waif of humanity, but as very part of them, merged in them, he was not particularly distinct but personally alive.

In the passage from his account of his life while on the Aran Islands, a phase of this side of him comes out, casting strangely significant lights right and left

in elucidation of much. "It was one of the dark sultry nights peculiar to September," he says, "with no light anywhere except the phosphorescence of the sea, and an occasional rift in the clouds that showed the stars behind them. The sense of solitude was immense. I could not see or realise my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying birds, and of the smell of the seaweed." That he should have spoken of himself on a crucial event near the end of his days as reading Spinoza is significant; but philosophies do not make a man; a man weaves his philosophy from his temperament, or loves that philosophy to which his soul inclines. Self is itself; and the September night on Aran Island was before Spinoza.

Nor was he the less himself because he seemed to exist merely in the "perception of the waves and of the crying of birds, and of the smell of seaweed." It is a poor philosophy that sees individuality only in irritability. Spontaneity is the breath of being. And it was because he was spontaneous that mood flowed into mood in him, and emotion succeeded emotion, till in the very quiescence of vital self he passed into a large unity that seemed only perception. Such a temperament will seem little likely to achieve the clash and oppugnancy of dramatic art; and, indeed, it was the cause of the chiefest difficulty in

his drama, a difficulty that happens to be its most distinctive beauty.

It was an extraordinarily fine instinct in Mr. Yeats that sent Synge to the Aran Islands. It might almost be said that they were waiting to cradle him, and wean him to artistic maturity. His art derives from nothing but himself; but so much does he owe those far islands in the Atlantic that, however resolutely one clings to the conviction that the soul of a man is its own sufficiency for the greatness of his utterance, it seems difficult to imagine how he could ever have won to artistic speech in any other surroundings. That the Aran Islands should have provided him with the scene for one play, and given him the plot for another, is a small matter. They bred his soul; they fed him with their own great silences; they sang him the music of speech to which his soul at once responded with the shout of discovery; they found him the cadence he cried for; they steeped his mind in an atmosphere that ever thereafter marked all things he did. His artistic soul came to them a starveling; it went out a grown man in full vigour of health.

Many instances of this could be adduced. Let two examples be sufficient, seeing that they accord with two distinctive characteristics of his work.

He says of the people of Aran: "The direct sexual

instincts are not weak on the island, but they are so subordinated to the instincts of the family that they rarely lead to irregularity. The life here is still at an almost patriarchal stage, and the people are nearly as far from the romantic moods of love as they are "from the impulsive life of the savage." He is, indeed, speaking of the people of Aran; but he might well be characterising his own plays. The roots of both alike are in very homely earth; they both alike have little affinity with the stars. In one of his poems he passes in review all the great Queens of Romance, and adds sardonically:—

" Yet these are rotten—I ask their pardon—
And we've the sun on rock and garden."

In another he regards even the mythology of Ireland, so sacred to the comrades in art with whom he worked, and sings:—

" Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,
Ye plumed yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with hand in hand
To learn their ecstasy.

" We'll stretch in Red Dan Sally's ditch,
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
The badger and the hare."

It even becomes an Art Creed, for, disavowing exaltations for his poetry, he says, "It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it

must learn to be brutal," and the mind inevitably goes back to the Aran mother laughing and mocking at her daughter writhing with the toothache.

Yet if the strength of earth be characteristic of Synge's work there is another characteristic that links with it, which no less recalls the Isles of Aran. It is the strange and mystic sense of doom that broods over all his dramas, even though it be a comedy like *The Well of the Saints*. Like a background of tragical intensity, it is never absent from his work: an impersonal pain significant of impending terror. And one remembers what he himself has written of the keening of the women of Aran: "This grief of the keen is no personal complaint for the death of one woman over eighty years, but seems to contain the whole passionate range that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with wind and seas." Or again, as he speaks with men fishing after having come from a funeral, he says: "I could not help feeling that I was talking with men who were under a judgment of death." The deep sense of doom, or, as he expresses it elsewhere, a "desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world," is never

absent from him. It winds in the very cadence of his speech.

It was such a man that the Isle of Aran shaped for work. Even though it be true that he coloured the inhabitants with something of his own brooding intensity, the deeper truth is that they waked this mood in him to artistic realisation by the touch of affinity. They made it musical in him, and gave it a voice to speak by.

When he turned them to dramatic work it was to frame a story he had heard told at Inishmaan into a play. But it was to frame it in the light of a rich discovery. He himself protested later that when he was writing *In the Shadow of the Glen* he "got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen." Yet it was Inishmaan and Aranmore that gave him to know that the speech of servant girls and ballad women in Ireland mattered very essentially in his art. A flaming richness of imagination, a haunting and beautiful cadence and construction of speech, they gave him, that under his hands swelled to new harmonies of lovely music. It is not all tramps between Kerry and Mayo speak as Christy Mahon speaks. It is even likely that a good number would

repudiate it—Pegeen Mike herself was amazed at it. But, if they did so, it would be the handling of the instrument they would repudiate, not the instrument itself.

When on the Great Blasket, off the coast of Kerry, Synge once took the violin from the island fiddler, and played on it for the people to dance to. They were not happy to his playing as they were to the fiddler they knew; but the fiddler himself recognised the abler power. He saw that whereas he used only the poor middle of his bow, Synge utilised the full sweep; and that where his wrist was stiff, and therefore his strokes disjointed, Synge's wrist was supple and his strokes mellow in their flow one upon another. Even so it was in the matter of language. An example may serve. For there are two accurate idioms of speech very much on the tongue of the people of the West; and both express the sense of time with extraordinary precision. In answer to such a question as "How's the health?" the reply may perhaps come, "Faith, I'm after having the Influence," or "I'm well presently, thank God!" The immediate past or the immediate moment (not, be it noted, the corrupt English usage, dating, it may be, from some fatal tendency to procrastination in the race) is thus expressed sharply. But in Synge's idiom there is no sharpness: all is mellow and musical.

How then does he manipulate the above usages? The result is noteworthy; for the "presently" is virtually abolished, while the "after" is drawn into the cadence and stripped of its sharpness. It is scarcely to be detected, whereas in the speech of the people it is very easily detected. The mellow movement of the master-hand has made a richer music echo from the instrument, but the instrument is no less the same as the people use for their simpler purposes. So truly identical is it that it is impossible to recite it comfortably without using the brogue of the people.

This very fact that he should thus have turned the occasional sharpness of distinction into mellowness of movement is strangely significant. It accords fitly with the mood of the man and the landscapes he stirred in, even as it strikes the dominant note of his plays. The customary conception of the dramatic in art and life is just this very sharpness, sharpness even to antithesis. Lear standing watching his daughters, as Regan goes over and takes Goneril's hand—that seems the thought of dramatic tragedy; not an old woman keening over a turf fire. But *Riders to the Sea* is of a new order of tragedy altogether. It is, perhaps, not so much tragedy as a fragment of life set in the atmosphere of tragedy. Even as there is not water in a mist of the hills

because it is all moisture, so there is not tragedy in the *Riders to the Sea* because it is all tragical. It does not, like *Macbeth*, open in hope and wind to a disaster that falls like a shock; its opening note is conceived in gloom, the movement passes in intensity of gloom, concluding with the scanty relief of hopelessness. We know, and are vitally interested in *Macbeth*, and his tragedy is poignant to us with a sense of personal loss. But we do not know Maurya thus. She is not a person to us. She is the soul of a mother set before a cliff of terror. We shudder for all mothers of Aran in her, whereas "Out, out, brief candle!" comes to us from a man whose magnificence won us.

The interest is the interest of a situation in the wider meaning of that word. And when Maurya comes in slowly, with the undelivered bundle of bread in her hand, and sits over the turf fire keening softly, the whole situation narrows and sharpens to intensity. When, in answer to her daughter's impatient query "Did you see Bartley?" she replies, "I seen the fearfulest thing," the senses sharpen to expectation of the doom the very opening words of the play had struck. And this is how it arrives:—

NORA. Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he

riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him. (*She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.*) The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN. What is it you seen?

MAURYA. I seen Michael itself.

CATHLEEN (*speaking softly*). You did not, Mother. It wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God.

MAURYA (*a little defiantly*). I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare, and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN (*begins to keen*). It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

With that the situation widens to the conclusion, and therewith Synge makes the only mistake in the play. For the intensity having once been released it will not be possible to sharpen it again. Thus, when the women come in and kneel and keen, and Bartley's body is brought in, the failure of the mind to respond to the horror it has already passed through so shrewdly and so sharply, makes their grief seem overwrought. It is Maurya who, dramatically, saves the situation. She brings the whole action on the lower plane of tragical resignation, saying, as she sprinkles the body with holy water, "It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark

night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and a great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking." Six sons, a husband, and a father-in-law has the sea taken in toll from her; and the fullness of sorrow is its own relief. Her closing words are: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."

With the exception of its one fault, the fault of a part that is strained, the play is a complete and perfect movement from start to finish, moving through its action like a foamless roller. The deftest skill of the intelligent craftsman is necessary to ensure this, hidden away though it be in the excellence of its own workmanship. Turf for the fire in one place, Michael's clothes in another, the ominous white boards, and the forgotten cake in Maurya's hand, all keep the movement in flow past awkward places till its course is accomplished. And it is worthy of note that they each and all come to be symbols of doom, being thus not only aids to the movement, but heightening, moreover, and intensifying the very cause and tragical colour of its being.

The interest of his earlier play, too, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, is that of a situation. The outward interest, what may be called the plot, is that of a

nan who, doubting his wife's fidelity, feigns death so as to discover her. Such was the story as Synge had it told him in Inishmaan. In his hands, however, an inner interest appears, and, as one may almost expect, it is the interest of a soul. Even as in the *Riders to the Sea*, so here, too, the atmosphere is in business to aid this interest. There the atmosphere was heavy with tragedy and poignant with eternal suffering; here it is gloomy with loneliness and isolation, even to oppression. And so the secret of Nora Burke is unlocked. We do not know her in any personal sense; but we see the soul of a young woman hungry for living. Her husband is old, and can find nothing congenial for her. There are no cottages near hers in the glen that is too often heavy with mists to the blotting-out of the sun and all brightness. It all oppresses her; and Life is slipping away from her. So that when Patch Darcy passes to and fro she looks for his coming gladly, to engage words with him; and when Patch Darcy dies she turns to Michael Dara the herd.

Outer and inner interest develop together aptly and unobtrusively, so that when the mock dead man rises and bids her begone out of his house we are not surprised to hear the tramp invite her to go forth and taste the world with him. "You'll not be getting your death with myself, lady of the house,"

says he, "and I knowing all the ways a man can put food in his mouth. . . . We'll be going now, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in his place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time, 'It's a grand evening, by the grace of God,' and another time, 'It's a wild night, God help us; but it'll pass, surely.'" Or: "Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes, and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm; and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a tale of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you, and the light of your eyes; but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up; and there'll be no old fellow wheezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to your ear."

We are not surprised at the invitation. We are scarcely perplexed at seeing her go. Our interest goes with her, rather, for she goes, if to a hard life, yet to Life and the glory of the earth. Such is drama indeed, but drama as it has not hitherto been known.

It does not so much progress to a catastrophe as it moves and passes away in music. The action, what action there be, does not break into dramatic detail; it broods in the very spirit of dramatic intensity. It is like a Galway landscape: temperamental but not distinctive; too temperamental to be distinctive.

In his preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* Synge has something to say in direct criticism of Drama; and it is perhaps not too much to say that there is more of the matter of substantial criticism in his few passing comments than is to be discovered in much dialectical analysis, for he strikes to the grand first principles of Drama. There he ranks Drama with the symphony, claiming that it is the function of neither to "teach or prove anything." Since the criticism of creative genius is ever the outer earth-works of its own citadel, this short preface, with its sweeping-aside of "analysts with their problems and teachers with their systems," and its analogy of drama to symphony, becomes doubly significant. He goes on, however, to speak of the necessity of humour in drama; and therewith his criticism comes more closely home to himself. For as one recalls Falstaff's open mouthful of laughter, or Molière's subtle laughter of the mind, it will be wondered what fashion of humour so brooding and passionate a mind as Synge's will produce. And, surely enough,

what the mind might guess the fact achieves. For the result is so deeply sardonic as nearly to overleap humour into the further depths of actual tragedy. In *The Tinker's Wedding* the boisterous conclusion thwarts this, but in *The Well of the Saints* this is manifest throughout. It is not that the humour is touched with tears; the richest humour is often thus. It is rather that the blade of the dramatist searches too deeply into the secrets of living. It seems sometimes as though the dramatist's energy of thought swept him past his artistic intention, calling into question the very richness of the things he praises so rarely at other times. It is not the less valuable for this. It is, perhaps, more valuable; it is certainly more estimable if the business of art be the unfurling of great minds.

The initial picture of two wrinkled, ugly, stunted beggars, blind, and therefore each deluded by the countryside into esteeming the other as the final consummation of male or female beauty, has itself gleams of tragedy in it. When the Saint restores their sight to them, and they come to look on one another amazedly, each reviling the other shrewdly and harshly, after their late deep contemptment with each other, it is not only tragical in itself, it cuts at very life. Nor does the next act relieve the pain. In truth, it drives the blade yet deeper home, for

And then he imagines himself "in a short while" with "a beautiful, long, white, silken, streaming beard, you wouldn't see the like of in the eastern world"! As the "good days" of delusion and "great talking" return, the irony is there, but gentle. When the Saint returns to give them back their sight, and they will none of it, the humour grows sardonical again, relieved though it be by boisterousness.

If *Riders to the Sea* is Synge's loftiest achievement, *The Well of the Saints* is his most human. And even as these touch one pole and another, so is the famous *Playboy of the Western World* his greatest, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, despite some strange faults, his most beautiful. But *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World* stand in a manner of illuminative relation one to the other. For while the first is energetic and distinctive in a way strange with him, the latter is brooding and temperamental in a way wholly his own.

Once again a dramatic situation in the history of a soul passes before us in musical movements. In *In the Shadow of the Glen* it had been the cramped hungry soul of a young wife; and now it is the swathed soul of a youth strangely learning his own value. He had grown up under a harsh father's control to reckon himself a fool and worthless. His father genuinely thought it so; and he accepts it so. But one day.

provoked to excess, he lifts his loy and strikes his father working in the field, stunning him. No sooner is the blow struck, however, than his old-time pusillanimity asserts itself, and he flies in terror, thinking himself a murderer.

Yet to this is added another crisis in another soul: the soul of a young girl impatient at the littleness of life about her. When Christy Mahon enters her father's shebeen, terrified to think his crime is discovered, the manly vigour of the deed strikes on her imagination with a glowing sense of colour. It is no matter of moralities with her; the insistent fact is that here was a man capable of a divine fury of soul, a man that therefore put to shame the male kind about her, her betrothed Shawn Keogh especially. Her glory in his virility glows about Christy like a summer sun, and he swells to her estimation of him, the swathings dropping away from his soul. He discovers himself. He is pitted by her against the countryside, and he beats them all at their sports. He becomes the Playboy of the Western World, and Pegeen Mike's accepted lover.

Then his father returns, and the old terror comes back on him; whereas Pegeen turns from him, seeing his deed now as not virile at all but only cowardly. Yet he is not wholly what he once was. It is with some passion that he says, "If you're after making

a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome it's worse, maybe, go mixing with the fools of earth." He strikes his father again with a løy to win back his heroic halo about him, but to Pegeen now this is merely sordid. "I'll say a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk," says she; "but what's a squabble in your back-yard, and the blow of a løy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed." But they cannot fend his discovery of himself. When his doughty parent appears yet again he goes out with him, now the master of the two, telling the company "you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day." He leaves Pegeen to lament that he is, indeed, the only Playboy of the Western World.

The *Playboy* is thus not alone a well-nigh faultless play; its deeper interest is that it chanced to be the play in which Synge most fully found himself. The situation of a soul finding itself caused his brooding genius to expand to the fullest. All the music of speech that he had learned from Aran to Wicklow strikes its richest harmonies as Christy's tongue learns its own power. It is thus he says: "It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small

towns with the light shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty stomach failing from your heart." It is thus the eloquence of love comes first on his lips: "It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's, or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair." It is thus, when Pegeen turns from him, he cries out on her that "there's torment in the splendour of her like, and she a girl any moon of midnight would take pride to meet, facing southwards on the heaths of Keel. But what did I want crawling forward to scorch my understanding at her flaming brow?" In the Preface he says that "in a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple." But it is not always nor often that a soul could feel such ecstasy in it to swell to such music as this. The mood in Christy Mahon called out the utmost in Synge, and that mood was one of adventurous imagination.

It is not only in speech, however, that the *Playboy* excels. Its craftsmanship is of the deftest. The

lurking figure of his father in the second and third acts seems only to be a preparation for his final entrance. It is that; but it is more also. It carries the movement on past awkward gaps with extraordinary skill. The result is that the whole thing swells to its conclusion without a ruffle, one mood or movement passing into and becoming part of another in a manner strangely akin to the mind of the man himself. It and he are one in a peculiar sense.

The same skill of craftsmanship does not mark *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Doubtless this was because he died at work on it, and therefore it may not be estimated as a finished piece of work. As it stands, however, the charge holds good. The fault is the worse since it occurs at the very crisis. That Deirdre should beg Conchubor for life for Naisi and herself, despite the fact that she urged their return from Alban fearful lest Naisi's love for her should fail, and desirous of a death together to frustrate this, might have been covered by a hint of frailty in her, however little likely it might seem. But that, after Naisi has been done to death, she should wail over his body, speaking in prospect of a long life of miserable retrospect, is unforgivable. For we know that she is to die at her own hand. And we feel that she is being kept alive till Fergus and Conchubor return to witness her death and Emain is burnt. Since the passage

of time is not only markedly artificial, but harrowing and painful moreover, rebellion is stirred in reader or witness. The conclusion is ruined despite the high mood wherewith Deirdre goes to her death. The less easily is this to be understood since in the second act Synge displays his dramatic sense at its highest. When Deirdre comes out of her tent and hears Naisi confess to Fergus the possibility that love may fail in him, the situation is critical, not only for her, but for the dramatist. A lesser dramatist would have made her withdraw into the tent, and when subsequently she urges their return to Emain the appeal would have been to irony. Not so Synge! He lets Naisi know she has overheard him. He takes the sterner task on him, directing the emotion with all the facts known, making the appeal to stark strength of dialogue.

It is a beautiful scene this, the most beautiful in all the slender volume of his work. Deirdre chooses death rather than a withering of love, and thereby love is approved in her. "There are as many ways to wither love," she says, "as there are stars in a night of Samhain." "It's a long time we've had, pressing the lips together, going up and down resting in our arms, Naisi, waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest. . . . It's a long

time we've had, but the end has come, surely." It chastens as the highest beauty ever chastens, and thereto the style is chastened and exalted. He who bade adieu to Angus, Maeve, and Fand, to drink in Tubber fair, was won at length by the higher beauty. He gave it the strength of earth to glory in, while it gave him an exaltation that purged. That the product should be marred at its finish is a pity of pities, for the interest of the psychic demands attention to the end. Had Synge lived, such a complaint would probably not have had its cause.

It is permitted to none to rule the future, or to coerce its will. To the artist his art is largely its own end, and the making of Beauty an abundant recompense. Yet in this very making of Beauty he lays hold on Eternity; and, except for such mortal accidents as buried Blake for awhile, the maker of Beauty, so it be Beauty, does, indeed, hold the ages in his fist. Therefore, in asking if the art of J. M. Synge will abide, the question is not if it be clever or forceful, analytical or brilliant, but merely one of the final appeal of Beauty. And by such an appeal there seems little question in the matter. For he brooded on Beauty; the very pages of his prose topography are alive with it. He brooded on the soul of man: even when describing the inhabitants of Aran, Wicklow, or Kerry, he does not

paint externals, he conveys essences; he does not describe pictures, he carries atmospheres and moods through the mind. He was not one to spring to energy; he brooded in peace.' And if his brooding conveys a sense of bitterness and utter desolation, it is yet a "desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world." Such a mood does not achieve a bulk of work. Moreover, he died young. But he found his soul; he found Beauty; and he found the Art that could enable him to express one in terms of the other.

ROBERT BROWNING'S VISION .

THE seeming inevitableness with which contemporary criticism has gone astray in its judgments on Poets and their Poetry is, from one point of view, one of the humours of English literature. Looking over the calm, imperturbable way in which Poetry has taken its splendid passage through the years, unmindful of any—unmindful chiefly of the clamorous critics who have stood at byways like showmen loudly voicing the claims of their byway to be Poesy's highway, and hurrying up the highway in the end with more speed than dignity—is, in the main, more a happy than an unhappy spectacle. It is, at any rate, a salutary spectacle: though, from the nature of the case, it is difficult to see how it can be other than so to the end of days, seeing it is the especial business of the Poet to bring something that shall increase the vision of men, to which, therefore, the vision of men shall need time to adjust itself. And it is a spectacle that stretches back further than we are inclined to think. For example, we imagine Shakespeare as overtopping handsomely the age which he, with his sovereign, shares in naming; and

we trick his contemporaries out in our own imaginations. It is our thought, however: not theirs. It was not for his greatness Shakespeare was praised by his own age; not for the amazing and mingled omniscience and exaltation of him; but for his sugary sweetness, his fertility and invention, if not, indeed, his graciousness of person. A careful reading of the literature of the time makes it tolerably clear that to the men of their day it was Ben Jonson and not Shakespeare who overtopped his time. The echo of this can be heard quite clearly in Milton. So, too, when Blake sang, it was Crabbe and not he whom the critics crowned. Not Wordsworth, but Thomas Campbell and Walter Scott won their plaudit. With that plaudit in his ear Campbell jested on Shelley, who was rejected as a "pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, and sensuality" by those who acclaimed Byron. Not only so: not only content to choose with unerring wrongness the indifferent of two names both with a claim to memory, Keats, as Shelley shrewdly pointed out at the time, was rejected where even the poetical works of Dean Milman were loudly praised.

After so immediate an unhappy memory singing in their ears, one would have thought that critics, however much they might have desired to laud Tennyson, would have been tender in disparaging Browning. After having dismissed as blasphemous

and sensual a poet whom all now see as burning in the white light of purity, singular purity, and holy desire, one would have imagined that critics would not so quickly have rushed to say that Browning's phrasing was obscure, and that he was difficult to read, faced by the fact that his phrasing is seldom, if ever, so obscure as Shakespeare's, whereas, apart from *Sordello*, he is no whit more difficult to read than is Milton. But the trouble sprang from a deep cause. As in the case of Blake and Wordsworth and Shelley, so again in the case of Browning, critics were not willing to accept, they either superciliously rejected or superficially neglected, the poet's point of view; whereas it would seem a commonplace that it is not until a poet's point of view has been accepted that his burning vision can be seen. It is for this reason that a poet seldom sings to his own generation. He must, it seems, always wait till at least another layer beneath shall have formed itself. It is chastening to think that a poet when he sings, sings to an audience that is framing the alphabet in its mind—is taking the first steps of progress towards his song and his vision.

With Browning, however, the interest is heightened by the peculiar nature of the problem he set. Steadily and firmly he has brushed aside one and another, till it is not too much to say that he has emerged, or is

like to emerge, in the foremost rank of English poets, with such as Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley for companions; yet it must be admitted that, standing there, there is an oddness about his presence in that company. His own age, we know, regarded him less as a poet than as a consummate diner-out; it even attributed the partial success he won with the critics in *The Ring and the Book* to the operation of that social advantage. In Lockhart's phrase, he did not at all look "like a damned literary man," whereas Tennyson, with whom he naturally stood in contemporary comparison, looked his part even to the matter of raiment. Nor is it only a matter of personal appearance or habit of life. However much these things may have influenced his contemporaries, they can have little hold on those who have not seen him plain, and have not stopped and talked to him; and yet the mind is so clothed with cant meanings of what poetry is that it will turn with distaste from the shallowness and smugness of *The Idylls of the King*, and still think of it as undeniable poetry, even while it denies that name to *Men and Women*, which it may read and re-read with increasing joy. Comparisons are undesirable; nevertheless, as the poets themselves appeared, so their poetry. Tennyson's poetry answers to the immediate and more obvious meaning of the

word poetry, even when it is least satisfactory, while Browning's poetry seems always to avoid it.

In his essay on Shelley's poetry Browning divided poets into two main divisions: objective and subjective; the fashioner or maker of beings independent of himself, and the seer or diviner of new correspondences between the universe and its Deity. It is, as most distinctions are, more an aid to thinking than a glance into the inner shrine of vision; yet it is serviceable as providing a clue to Browning's own procedure. He himself set the seer above the fashioner; yet, in spite of his sympathy with Shelley's poetry and its marked effect on his early work, it was the fashioner's and not the seer's way of work that was his. The seer sings out of his own personality: what he sings is what he himself has seen. Browning seems ever to need some other personality whom he may fashion to sing for him. He seems never to be able to get at grips with Reality till he is able to approach it in the guise of another's soul. In *Dramatic Lyrics* he sang:—

“ Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of the world of men for me.”

It was in very truth a need. To the seer—to such a seer as Wordsworth, for instance—Nature means

much. Nature is the lap where he may stand and look into the burning face of God. Nature is flaming with signs and hints of correspondences between things that link the universe into an irrefragable unity, so that a metaphor or simile becomes no mere literary exercise, but the startling discovery of some new at-one-ment between things, and imagery, such imagery as trails through the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, takes rank as authentic vision and not fanciful decoration. To Browning, too, doubtless Nature meant much. There are lines and passages in his poetry that recur to the memory, aspects of her seen or described in such a way as to make it evident that he saw her with far more than merely the painter's eye. Yet she had no direct vision to convey to him. Indeed, he seems almost uncomfortable in her presence, as though irked by the vision he knows there, feels there, but cannot quite see, and anxious to return to his refuge among the world of men, to see with their eyes and grope with their hands.. Or as he sang in the roaring Epilogue to *Pacchiarotto*, in which he smote—so soundly smote and so lustily smote—his inconsistent critics:—

“ Man's thoughts and loves and hates!

Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:

From grape of the ground, I made and marred

My vintage; easy the task or hard,

Who set it—his praise be my reward!

Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's,
Let them 'lay, pray, bray'—the addle-pates!
Mine be man's thoughts, loves, hates!"

"Earth is my vineyard": so he sings. But earth was more than his vineyard: earth was also his refuge. When "the sun looked over the mountain's rim," then, and chiefly then, as he looked down the "path of gold," the "need of a world of men" became most urgent. In the Prologue to *Fifine at the Fair* he has a fancy that he "swam out far in the bay," and as he swam there in a manner of flight, heaven above and water beneath,

"Yes! there came floating by
Me, who lay floating too,
Such a strange butterfly!
Creature as dear as new."

The butterfly's is flight indeed, in its natural element; his is only a mimicry of flight in an

"uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
Pretend as they were not clay."

He fancies them tasting of flight thus, flight through the heaven that is poetry, the poetry that is heaven, to the Reality of which one is the vision and the other is the splendour. Yet—

"And meantime, yonder streak
Meets the horizon's verge;
That is the land to seek
If we tire or dread the surge:

" Land the solid and safe—

To welcome again (confess!)

When, high and dry, we chafe

The body, and don the dress.

" Does she look, pity, wonder

At one who mimics flight,

Swims—heaven above, sea under,

Yet always earth in sight? "

But the " world of men " was even yet more than a refuge or a vineyard. " I have, you are to know," he once wrote to a correspondent, " such a love for flowers and leaves, that I every now and then in an impatience at being unable to possess them thoroughly, to see them quite, satiate myself with their scent—bite them to bits." It is that very impatience that thwarts him in seeking to pluck the mystery of things for himself. Put a rose into his hand, and what does it mean? It makes him impatient; it, as has been said, irks him. But put that rose into the hands of one of his world of men: into, say, the hands of John of Halberstadt: what then? Why, then—

" He with a ' look you! ' vents a brace of rhymes,

And in there breaks the sudden rose itself,

Over us, under, round us every side,

Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs

And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—

Buries us with a glory, young once more,

Pouring heaven into this shut house of life."

It was as if, looking to see what the rose meant to John of Halberstädt, it came upon him with a sudden uprush what the rose meant to him. Not only did the attempt to see reality through the eyes of another give him an intentness and patience that otherwise he might have lacked, but, striking along the lines of his receptivity, it made the world of men his stepping-stone to reality.

Thus, he was no mere maker of men and women in the purely objective sense. He was not merely the creator of men in their "thoughts, loves, hates," content if he could present them living as Scott and Crabbe did. His creatures became eyes and ears to him wherewith to see and hear things more sharply and intensely than he himself could. They became as so many cloaks to him, clothed in whom he could enter at once through divers doors of the Temple of Truth. Through them all he could see the much more that would have escaped a single vision; and in them each he captured the intentness that annulled the irresolution consequent on confusion. For example: is it the coming of Christianity into the world? How shall a man such as he, a man with a strong bent for strange philosophical research, a man instinct with classic culture, and a man, moreover, whose whole soul rose insurgent for a revelation of love in a world whose being and whose laws made

love a paradox otherwise inconceivable—how shall such a man state his attitude to that? His acceptance he did assert. But how little that expressed him! What worlds remained untold! What said the philosopher there? How spake the artist whose business it was to make Beauty, and who thereby took into his hands the cup of joy for ever, stirring unquenchable thirsts in him? Not in his proper affirmation could he utter all that. But take the three poems that celebrate the dawn of Christianity into the world! Cleon, as a Greek, may reject the teaching of “a mere barbarian Jew,” yet it is clear that the teaching of the mere barbarian Jew brings him just that cool cup that his art has set him athirst for. Karshish, the Arab physician, in *An Epistle*, and John in *A Death in the Desert*, on the one hand and the other, show the impact of this new revelation on minds inclined to curious philosophical learning and full of quick personal aspiration.

Or is it the attitude of the Artist to his Art? We who have all Browning's work before us know that there was in him the possibility of the artist who could turn away resolutely from vulgar success, in the secrecy of his own soul to work the thing that pleased him; that there was also the artist who could happily take all good things, or seeming good things, as they came (the artist that wrote *How we carried*

the good news to Ghent); and also the artist whose labour consistently was to express the thing just beyond his reach, and who knew that to fail to reach forward would be to fall into sterility, perfect or imperfect. He was not one of these, but at one time all three. Each expressed no more than a facet of himself; and he could discover each facet in turn by looking at Art through such different temperaments as those of Pictor Ignotus, Fra Lippo Lippi, and Andrea del Sarto in the unique trilogy in *Men and Women*. Nor is it merely that he expressed himself in this way. In expressing himself so he discovered himself so.

In this he is, in the terms of his own distinction, not only a fashioner, but a seer also. He is a seer through the creatures he has fashioned. Indeed, he is only interested in his creatures at those angles of their lives that are full of crisis—as though it was then, and then only, he could look through them to the realities beyond that caught his interest, they being opaque to him at all other whiles. It was that one vivid situation in Andrea del Sarto's life, that one crucial moment when his life spread itself out before him like a drama, that Browning was interested in; and only in Andrea del Sarto for the sake of that moment. In the picture from which Browning drew his conception, the situation is so vivid that, with the

poem before us, it is not difficult to see him looking through it to the interest beyond. A variety of things may help to create such a situation and such a moment: a chance meeting in "Dis aliter visum," an indiscreet discovery in "Fra Lippo Lippi," the fullness of achievement in "Abt Vogler"; but it is the situation that matters, for it is then that his characters become illumined with new meaning. It is only at such moments that the creatures can lend the creator eyes and ears to see and hear withal.

A "fashioner," or objective poet, is usually in the habit of seeking a dramatic guise for his workmanship; and it is not surprising to see that the majority of Browning's early works are all dramatic. Yet a dramatic poet is interested in his characters for their own sakes, and not merely for what they may mean to him at one moment of their lives. He may be, and according to the greatness of his genius he will be, interested in the destiny they may suggest; and this will be suggested in the tragic or comic solution they between them will achieve. In other words, however deeply he may see into them, he sees them from without; he is not so much concerned with any portion of them that is not employed in the dramatic field, but he is vitally concerned with every whit of them that is so employed. With Browning it is different. He is concerned from

within outwards. In his dramas there are some portions of his characters employed in the dramatic field that interest him but little. They are of little spiritual consequence to him. On the other hand, there are whole phases of character that have no dramatic employment that concern him greatly, for they are of spiritual importance to himself. In other words, his interest is not with the character in his deed, but with the character before the deed, with the possibility ripe in him for an interesting diversity of deed. It is not the action that fascinates his mind, but the burning seed-plot of action, for it is there the dreadful meanings of man's life shift and shape themselves like portents on a stormy sky. As his Luria says to Domizia:—

“ To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self,
Your quick sense looks: you crown and call aright
The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,
Takes flesh i' the world and clothes itself a king.”

It is with this clue that the pope in *The Ring and the Book* dissevers the tangled webs of the story before him, seeking to judge justly and fearlessly, saying:—

“ For I am ware it is the seed of act,
God holds appraising in his hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence on the world below,
Leafage and branchage vulgar eyes admire.”

In his first of dramas, in what, indeed, is his first notable poem, *Paracelsus*, he is already so much

aware of the bent of his own mind that he declared his intention clearly. In the original Preface he wrote: "Instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded; and this for a reason. I have endeavoured to write a poem, not a drama." And it is clear that he has written a poem, not a drama, although he has couched his poem in the dialogue framework inevitably associated with drama. A careful comparison will show that there is not so wide a difference between *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*, the poem he next engaged on, although one he called a dramatic poem and the other a narrative poem. The machinery of one is dialogue even as the machinery of the other is narrative; but the chief business of each poem, what may be called the central purpose of each poem, is enacted in the monologues of each character. It is there we see unwind and unfold the ravelled possibilities of action, of success or failure, and of all that is fateful in the eternal destinies of men. In these monologues we are taken behind the scenes. We leave the footlights without, where the

character rings down the coin that he will elect barter with, the deed that shall give his soul whatever be the consequence; and we see the soul with a variety of coinage, true coin or false counted before him, with a diversity of possible deeds into which he may be content to shape himself, but as yet unso and unshaped. There is nothing unimportant there there is no shadow of a possibility there that ranks unequal with all other possibilities. Or as Pippa sang:-

“ Say not ‘ a small event ! ’ Why ‘ small ’ ?
Costs it more pain than this, ye call
A ‘ great event,’ should come to pass
Than that ? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power may fall short in or exceed ! ”

A curiosity of mood such as this is essentially dramatic, and yet its very nature is to preclude it from the achievement of Drama. Being concerned with souls before the decision of action, it is obviously concerned with men and women before the moment when their several destinies cross and sway one another; and it is this moment that makes Drama. It might be said that Drama is the result of a number of anterior dramatic decisions. The dramatist assumes such decisions as the basis of his workmanship; Browning is concerned with the achievement of such decisions. Had Browning had the telling of the tragedy of Othello we should have had a mono-

logue from Iago giving us the story from his point of view, in order that thereby we might be enabled to see the resolution of decision taking shape in his mind, another from Othello, and another from Desdemona, who would have survived long enough to that end, and it would have been left to Cassio to give us the tragic loading of the bed. Each decision would have been dramatic: but it is the sum total of the decisions that would have made Drama.

It is in this sense that Browning is dramatic; and therefore it is that *Pippa Passes* is so characteristic a piece of work of his. In each of the four situations chosen, situations that Pippa conceives as full of happiness, a fateful decision is pending in the balance. In each case the characters of the situation have their hands irresolutely wandering over a bed of flowers, not knowing which bloom to pluck and wear for shame or glory on their souls. It is this situation that fascinates Browning's interest, because it is this situation that reveals to him with vivid and startling illumination the value of the realities beyond that would else have eluded him: and hence the final influence that sends the hand swiftly down to the blossom of its choice becomes momentous and tragic. No matter how slight it may otherwise seem to be, its value becomes of the highest. Pippa's wandering songs on her one annual holiday are no great matter,

it would seem: no more than an idle jest turned against a comrade over wine. But one, as the other may make or mar a soul for all time.

It is so more or less in all his plays. In his historical plays there may of necessity be less of this (and therefore *Strafford* is of little consequence in the balance of the work); in his later plays it may so overburden the dialogue as to threaten its final disruption in the monologues of *Men and Women* and *Drama Personæ*; but all the while we feel he is waiting for his characters achieve that particular critical angle when they shall scintillate with their hidden and inner illumination. It is this vivid moment he celebrates in his vivid lyric, *My Star*:—

“ All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
(Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furl’d:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.”

In one instance, indeed, destructive of all dramatic intention, this “dartling” even continues beyond

the limits of the play. In his last play, *In a Balcony*, perhaps notably his last play, at its moment of conclusion the Queen does not seem even yet to have taken her final decision. It is in her that the play pivots; and when her tragic moment comes, she sees Life snatched from her very hand, and "goes out." What her decision with regard to the lovers is, we are not told. Constance hears the "measured, heavy tread" of the guard, and the hint is that they are coming to take the lovers to their doom. But we know that much later in life Browning himself earnestly discussed the possibility that the guard is not heard coming to take away the lovers, but to bear away the dead body of the Queen, she slain by her own hand. The Queen's resolve is never taken. The cloudy portents are still to be seen shifting and shaping on the sky.

Thus it is not surprising to see, in course of time, the unnecessary and cumbersome business of dialogue or narrative drop away, to leave the self-revealing monologue standing in its naked strength. In the third volume of *Bells and Pomegranates*, entitled *Dramatic Lyrics*, Browning had already been looking at Life through the vision of men and women, creatures of his. Only then, though the lyrics were dramatic in the sense that they expressed the moods and emotions of creatures of Browning, and not of Browning himself, they were not dramatic in the

sense that some vital shaping of character implicit in them. In a sense all lyrics are drama and the critic who gives to the lyric the sense personal emotion is only and arbitrarily insist on calling a passing moment eternity. Every work of Art was lived, and lived intensely, as was wrought. Thereafter it takes a detached & separate existence. Shakespeare lived Othello when he made him, even as Wordsworth lived *Tint Abbey* when he made it. Then, they were subjective once finished, they became objective, for the soul man lives on, and passes on, and changes. It is only question of phraseology. There is no lyric, surely, that expresses all of a man, or even all of him at that moment of utterance. A lyric can only express a phase of him: and if he choose to place that phase in circumstances other than his own in order to see it the better it does not at all mean that that phase is not his own.

Yet it was necessary, if dialogue and narrative were to drop away, that the explanations they offered to the situation implicit in the dramatic resolve and aspiration should be introduced into the monologue and the suspense of lyric emotion, however long the poem might be in which it is caught and crystallised is too acute to permit of such explanation. When "Kentish Sir Byng stood for his king, bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing," it was but a great

gay, rollicking hatred of crop-heads and a breezy love of bright attire and wine-cups as all good Parliamentarians must feel sometimes at the heart of them, or remain but lean-souled men for the lack of it. There was no better ship-money man than Browning, and yet he lived every moment of that lyric. But though it was no more than that, it lent itself very easily to development. It needed but little development to express, by implication, all the various sides of a dramatic situation, if its author were only happy in his choice of a promontory-peak from which the whole country could be viewed with one slow turn of the eye. And it was not likely that the man who sang

“ Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what’s a heaven for? ”—

the man who sang boldly

“ Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play!—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life’s set prize, be it what it will!

.
.

And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight were a vice, I say ”—

who maintained that the only man to be held in contempt was he who did not strive loftily and ambitiously, with failure and success as irrelevancies apart—such a man was but little likely to choose a wrong promontory-peak. For his attention was on that which is the secret of all Earth's interest.

So there came about that great sequence of monologues in *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ*. It seems inconceivable that the two volumes in which *Men and Women* made their appearance should have met with so slight an attention. One would have conceived that the critics, seeing a writer with such a diversity of riches in his fee, would, if only from curiosity, have endeavoured to assume Browning's point of view in order to discover what his vision was. Instead of which, they vamped inconsequentialities as to the difficulties of understanding him, whereas the only difficulty was that of discovering and assuming his point of view, of searching to see exactly what the monologue meant to him, and why he expressed himself through the lips of fifty others in this way. To deny that Browning has his vices of style would be foolish. Relative pronouns are readily dropped; small words are clipped and chipped mercilessly at times; words are taken across his knee and their quantity broken in order to fit them into some position in a line that

they have rebelled at; strange words are used, not because of their beauty, but because of his erudition. But these make him aggravating to read, not difficult to understand. Once the point of view of a poem is seen, its difficulties are gone. Even the aggravations often take a new meaning: for it would be clearly foolish to expect the same stately beauty of line from Fra Lippo Lippi as we are to receive from Cleon.

Whether such a development was or was not conscious and deliberate, matters little: the result was amazing enough, for all the critics' neglect. Probably with a man of Browning's faculty of mind—probing, searching, introspective—it was conscious. If it were so, it would explain the shout of joy with which he came upon *The Old Yellow Book* and the story that lay hidden in it in a perplexed series of legal pleadings and cross-pleadings:—

" Small quarto size, part print part manuscript:
A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact ,
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since."

It also explains the story of his at once, on reading the "square old yellow book," taking twelve pebbles from the road and arranging them at equal distances on the parapet bordering it, in representation of the twelve books of the poem; and the fact that he

penned in the book, in Greek, the line, "But for me the Muse in her strength prepares her mightiest arrow." His Art was awaiting such a consummation. His use of the monologue, as it had developed in his hand, only needed some such occasion. His previous book had been called *Dramatis Personæ*; but there the *dramatis personæ* were each of them concerned with his own drama. Their several monologues did not centre round a common story. But the conception of nine *dramatis personæ* (or rather six *dramatis personæ* and three onlookers), each of them in a lengthy monologue telling a single story from his or her own promontory-peak, each seeing the circumambient countryside differently arranged, each occupied with the history of a soul through the various crises that take the seed of act and develop it into leafage and branchage, giving it shape thereby for all time—such was a conception that might well thrill any artist; but coming, as it did, at a particular moment in the development of Browning's Art, how much more it meant to him cannot easily be said.

And how wonderful the result is! Its gifts are so various that it is difficult not to be tempted into language that loses sight of its origin and cause. Apart altogether from portraiture, for example, let one but read in due order the tale told by the three chief participants, Count Guido Franceschini,

Giuseppe Caponsacchi, and Pompilia. Each tale passes over the same incidents of the story; and each carries sympathy and conviction—a sympathy and conviction so complete that it is not easy to remember that there are other tales to be told. In itself this is no inconsiderable feat. It is in itself sufficient to show that the monologue was to Browning, in itself and in its implications, the discovery that should vindicate his Art. But there is the portraiture also; and here, it is necessary to say, Browning has not alone added to, but enriched the creatures of the world's literature. The portraits of *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ* were but sketches beside the human knowledge that went to the creation of such men as Count Guido and Giuseppe Caponsacchi. They touch all sides of human life. They nod at all points of the compass. The husband pleading for his life on the indictment of murdering his wife, who, when charged with cruelty towards her, does not deny it, but boldly embarks on the attempt to subdue the charge by frank casuistry, and succeeds, and is not merely arguing but expressing himself, is not a less masterly achievement than the “young, frank, personable priest,” who, while serving his church daintily in ladies' service, “a fribble and a coxcomb,” yet preserves a pure manliness that, at a glance from

a lovely-souled woman in distress, can stand erect in its challenging strength, never doubting the loveliness of her soul in spite of seeming letters to the contrary, finally throwing aside all chance of worldly success for the privilege of merely serving and saving her, afterwards in the teeth of lewd mockery to declare, proudly, that, purely, he loves her.

These two portraits in themselves were a distinction to any artist. But what of Pompilia? There is no doubt that she meant more to Browning than we imagine. There is an aloofness about her loveliness, a simple frankness withal, that suggest it. It would have been enough in most women to have been, on the one hand, the touchstone to Caponsacchi's true greatness, and, on the other, to have won from the old Pope so very beautiful and humble a tribute as he gives. But her loveliness and purity are not only a rumour. That were an easy thing, perhaps, for a poet to have achieved. But she has to maintain them and make them real in a monologue of nearly two thousand lines: and she succeeds. Join to these Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, counsel for Guido,

“ The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheeks and jowl all in laps with fat and law

.
Ovidian quip and Ciceronian crank,
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there;”

Juris Doctor Johannes Baptista Bottinus the Fisc, who, in his irritating zeal for having something to prove, assumes Pompilia's guilt in order to minimise the importance of it; and the old Pope, seeking to judge justly in that light of heaven that is almost falling at his feet: and a gallery of portraits faces us that is not easy to do justice to, save than to say that the poem they help to make is one of the very great things of our literature.

In his later work Browning went on to put the monologue to newer uses yet. Instead of merely declaring and defining the implicit drama, instead only of depicting the ravelled possibilities of action to which the crucial moment of decision came, the character chosen undertook, moreover, to defend, in a wonder of casuistry that puzzles the wit, the action it had decided upon. More than a hint of this was heard in *Bishop Blougram's Apology* and *Sludge the Medium*, but it was left to *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society*, and *Fifine at the Fair* to carry out the process in fullness of detail. Here, too, not less than in the simpler use of the monologue, it is not difficult to see Browning using his characters as agents in order to see things that he might have a difficulty in focussing in his own person. Indeed, in these two poems their very difficulty is just this. Time and time again the casuistry breaks, and Browning, through the eyes of his character, is

seen looking on the reality beyond. Then the clouds of casuistry roll on again: and it is not easy to say how far or how thoroughly we may trust the vision he seems to have seen. * * *

It is singular, and yet but fitting, that when he had to see his vision with his own eyes, and declare what he found to say in his own proper person, he lost rather than gained in distinctness. Towards the end of his days a great private loss helped him to make one of his loveliest of the later poems in *La Saisiaz*. In his earlier days, in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, he made a poem where he told his own story, a poem that his own generation understood where it found in the rest of his work only mystification. The shock of grief, and the seeking for wisdom in grief, give a quiet sunset beauty to *La Saisiaz* that is searching, whereas the earlier poem jolts and jars against this and that would-be exponent of Christianity; but in neither one nor the other do we seem to hear the authentic tones of Browning as we hear them when he gazes through this artist, as he struggles to express Beauty, or that musician, whose music kindles in him a passion for the moment when his broken, aspiring harmonies shall be completed, uplifted, and made eternal.

Both poems, for different reasons, are unsatisfactory. The man who, in *Men and Women*, can

express himself in such a width of sympathy and understanding, in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* finds himself at once at loggerheads with people. Instead of desiring to see through men and women, he was content to let his gaze rest on them; and the result was that they became opaque, and therefore meaningless, to him, and he became unsympathetic and, in the end, brusque. It is hard to conceive that the same man who wrote *Bishop Blougram's Apology* and *The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church* should have written *Christmas Eve*. Similarly with the later poem: it is difficult to believe that the poet who left only one conclusion to be drawn from the intentness of his vision through Karshish and Cleon should have been content to turn to personal argument in *La Saisiaz*. Both poems lack distinctness for the simple reason that he was too wide and various a personality to be able to express himself adequately in his own proper person. He could not bring himself to a focus there; but when he can get another to see for him, then indecision is lost, and we get a clear, ringing shout of discovery.

In his last magnificent words he expressed himself as

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

This was the man who expressed himself most fully in the creatures of his creation. His world of men expressed him as he expressed them, and they helped him to his vision and the distinctness thereof. They gave him width; and through them we catch the true accents of his voice. And if to help us to stand equipped in manliness and womanliness, loving Beauty and seeing Truth, ripe in sympathy and understanding, be any measure of greatness, then, even apart from all else, we must echo Landor and say, "Browning, a great poet, a very great poet indeed."

FALSTAFF'S NOSE

89

carriage"; whereas the first was not only sense, but very finely exemplary of Hamlet's swift, elliptical, revolted state of mind, and the second, in addition to being but poor sense, was an effort after compactness and prettiness very little likely to have been attempted by Hamlet at any time, much less in his wild and stormy hours of thought.

Still, precepts are more easily learnt than put into practice, and Dr. Johnson's is valuable in the teeth of his several violations of it. Readers of Shakespeare cannot but approve the doughty doctor. After some familiarity with the Shakespearean idiom, it is generally more possible to make sense out of the text of the First Folio than out of most emendations of it; indeed, it will generally be found that such emendations give a strange sense of shock to the acquired idiomatic atmosphere. For example, there are two things that very largely go to creating the Shakespeare idiom: one of these being his impatience with a merely compact and orderly picture, his eager leaping from one swift metaphor to another swift metaphor in a continual forward progression; and the other, an equally swift and elliptical way of thought. The first is an impatience with the formal consecutiveness of imagery; and the second, an impatience with the formal consecutiveness of thought. Of both of these his work is full. Now, in the instance

already given, both of these are the very atmosphere of the sentence as it stands in the First Folio, but both are dispelled in the orderliness of Warburton's emendation. Therefore, whether or no Warburton's suggestion be better than the First Folio, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that Shakespeare wrote the sentence as it appears in the earlier text.

But there is another element that goes to constitute the Shakespeare idiom: and that is, a rapid, almost startling, always beautiful picture, sketched in a few words; such a picture, indeed, as must compel us to believe that something similar to it had at some time passed under Shakespeare's observation, and had thus given the hint to his imagination. Instances abound. The most famous would perhaps be, "She sat like Patience on a monument, smiling at Grief," of which, so startling is it, that the lover would be prepared to affirm that, as Shakespeare penned it, he had some or other definite piece of statuary in his mind, which twined itself in his words, swiftly and precisely.

Did even space permit, it would be unnecessary further to instance this last characteristic of Shakespeare's method of imagery, for by their very nature such instances stand out and claim attention. Yet there is one such that all trace has been lost of in the

course of textual emendation. In a sense, it is the most beautiful of them all. Certainly it is one of the most noteworthy, seeing it can definitely be traced to his personal experience. Yet in no one present text does it appear. Each editor, and every editor, has conspired to pass it out of memory, and it would probably never have been recovered from darkness had not a fragment of his forgotten biography come to light to give us its clue.

When, in 1603, Elizabeth died, and James succeeded to the English throne, one of the first acts of the new monarch was to extend a kindly wing over the whole field of dramatic endeavour. Years before, in 1599, a company of English players had visited Scotland, and he had then an opportunity of giving proof of his kindly disposition towards the drama. For the ministers of Edinburgh had passed an Act of Sessions prohibiting attendance at the plays. Forthwith James had summoned the Sessions before his Council, and commanded them straightway to annul their Act. Now, as King of England, he gave even a more emphatic proof of his regard. To the company playing at the Fortune he granted permission to be known as the Prince's men. To those playing at the Red Bull he conceded the right to pass as the Queen's men. But those playing at the Globe he took under his own patronage. Previously, with

one break, in fact, since 1594, they had been known as the Lord Chamberlain's men; now they took rank as the "King's servants," and were entitled "freely to use and exercise the arte and facultie of playing comedies, tragedies, histories," and so forth. Not only so, but he proceeded to address all justices, mayors, and sheriffs, saying that not only were the players to be permitted "to show and exercise publicly to the best of their commodite" their "arte and facultie," but that "what further favour you shall shew to these our servantes for our sakes we shall take kindly at y^r handes." It was in this company Shakespeare was director and shareholder, having rather more than a "fellowship" in that "cry of players."

Yet this was not all. When, in this year, the king's coronation had been celebrated, the plague had been prevalent, and as it was obviously unwise to permit any concourse of the people under the circumstances, the royal progress through the City of London had necessarily been postponed to the following year. On March 15th, 1604, therefore, this duly came off, and for the purposes of this procession Shakespeare and eight of his colleagues received as a royal grant four and a half yards apiece of scarlet cloth to make their cloaks withal. Whether, in fact, they paced proudly in the procession or not

must remain a doubtful question. But the grant is sufficient to prove that when Shakespeare's company became known as the King's company this meant that they took rank as part of the King's household, for to all the King's household this grant was made, and only to the King's household.

A matter of further interest is that in August of the same year Juan Fernandez de Velasco, the Constable of Castile, came over to England on an embassy of peace, and stayed at what is now always known as Somerset House, but what was then frequently spoken of as Denmark House. Here he was greeted by a goodly company, among them some gentlemen clad in the royal scarlet habits and cloaks, in the capacity of attendant grooms. During the whole term of his stay they were there to wait upon him in some or other serviceable capacity. That Shakespeare was among these is known by the fact that Hemynge and Phillips, as treasurer and business manager of the King's company, were paid for this service, for themselves and "some of their fellows," as "his Maties Groomes of the Chamber and Players, for waytinge and attendinge on his Matie service, by commandemente, upon the Spanishe Embassador att Somersette House, for the space of XVIII. dayes."

Thus it is obvious that Shakespeare held rank, not

only as a dramatist and player, but also as a Groom of the Chamber. It is probably from his observation in his duties in this capacity that Shakespeare gleaned that experience that fills his later plays full of satirical comments as to the see-saw rivalry for favour in courtly places. But a matter that weighs far more considerably at the moment is that, as a member of the King's household, Shakespeare would have to make his appearance daily at the Board of Green Cloth. This Board was so called because it sat about a table invariably covered with green cloth. It met under the presidency of the Lord High Steward, whose business it was to dispense the household moneys.

Having once started on this train of thought, the memory cannot but have recalled to its attention that this could not have been Shakespeare's first attendance before the Board of Green Cloth. Back in the Christmas festivities of 1594 Shakespeare, together with Richard Burbage and Will Kempe, had acted twice at court. And on March 15th of the following year they had been required to attend at the meetings of this Board to receive what was, in the money of the time, very excellent payment for their services. The picture of this company seated about a green-covered table could not have failed to imprint itself on his imagination; and it would be strange if he

could not have wrought out of it some startling imagery that would hold and impress the reading eye.

Now it so chances that in the somewhat maligned First Folio, in the second scene of the second act of *Henry V.*, at the Boar's Head Tavern, Eastcheap, Mistress Quickly had occasion to inform Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, and the boy of the death of rare Sir John Falstaff. She thus described it: "'A made a fine end, and went away, an it had beene any Christoune Child: 'a parted ev'n just betweene Twelve and One, ev'n at the turning o' th' Tyde: for after I saw him fumble with the Sheets, and play with Flowers, and smile upon his fingers end, I knew there was but one way: for his Nose was as sharpe as a Pen and a Table of greene fields."

This fell into the hands of the learned Dr. Theobald; and so as to follow the exquisite logic of his train of thought it will be as well to give his note on the passage. Says he: "I have an edition of Shakespeare by me with some marginal conjectures of a gentleman sometime deceased; and he is of the mind to correct the passage thus: 'for his nose was as a pen, and 'a *talked* of green fields.' It is certainly observable of people near death, when they are delirious by a fever, that they talk of moving; as it is of those in a calenture, that they have their heads run on green fields. The variation from Table to

talked is not of a very great latitude; though we may still come nearer the traces of the letters by restoring it thus: 'for his nose was as sharpe as a pen, and 'a babled of green fields.' "

Thus the "gentleman sometime deceased," and Dr. Theobald, happily long since deceased, came to the earnest judgment that Falstaff "talked of moving"; and, moreover, being "in a calenture" "ran his head on green fields." Thus, too, Dr. Theobald, in his turn, ran his head also on green fields, but whether in a calenture or not it is unwise to conjecture. And the result has been that a chorus of generous praise has followed this noteworthy emendation; one saying that if Shakespeare did not write it so, at least he would have accepted it so; and another, that the emendation in question is "probably the happiest one ever made in Shakespeare's text." It has not occurred to any to bring to mind of what sort was Falstaff's life and way of thought. Nor does it seem to have occurred to any to bring to mind of what sort was Shakespeare's pathos. Neither Falstaff nor Shakespeare would have indulged in wayward sentimentalities when direct thought and swift magery best suited the urgent solemnity of death. Falstaff's thought, at his utmost bent of humour, was always philosophical; and this is proved in the very passage; for to demonstrate that he neither

ran his head on, nor babbled of, green fields, it is expressly stated that the one word on his lips was "God." Moreover, Shakespeare's pathos is short and sharp, voiceless sometimes; as when Falstaff himself was rejected by Prince Hal.

But imagine the picture that Shakespeare had before his eye! At his attendance before the Board of Green Cloth he would have seen quill pens lying on the table, with their white edges erect upon the cloth—frail and slender, like fairy scythes on an emerald meadow. He could not fail to have been impressed by the sight. There are numberless instances in his work that go to indicate him as one whom a sudden thought of beauty would catch, passing him into a vision of whimsical and timeless contemplation. It swept on him when he had to describe the disfigurement on Imogen's breast; and he passed to gazing into the well of a cowslip. It may have been thus he noted the pens that lay strewn on the green cloth. Or it may have shone on him at the moment of intellectual labour. It is strictly stated that Falstaff played with flowers, and flowers would inevitably suggest the green, and thus lead his instinct back to the pens on the table.

Yet, in whatever manner the vision swept through his mind, the image required is quite distinct and

clear. Moreover, it only demands the alteration of one word, and would read: "for after I saw him fumble with sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way: for his nose was as sharp as a pen *on* a table of green fields." How startling and vivid is the picture that forthwith is awaked. What a well of tears bubbles to the brim of the soul at the thought of gay, fat, old Falstaff brought so low that his nose may be likened to a quill pen, so thin and frail had it become. How inevitably the eye sees the picture of a quill pen lying on a green table, sharp, slender, and deathly white! How the heart is gripped almost to terror!

The use of the word "fields" may arise from Shakespeare's habit of heraldic speech. He is for ever falling into it; and one need not be reminded of the player's description of "the rugged Pyrrhus," in Hamlet, as having his "dead and black complexion smeared with heraldry more dismal: head to foot now is he total gules." This habit of heraldic speech, like his continual use of terms in falconry, is even more than a mere mannerism in him. • It takes rank as part of the Shakespearean idiom. He not only illustrates his meaning thereby, nor is he merely content to pun with it: it often gives an indefinable yet quite distinct colour to many of his phrases. So

that when he likened the dying Falstaff's nose to one of the quill pens he had seen at the exchequer committee, so pale and slender was it, his mind may at once have conceived of the green cloth on which the pens had lain as an emerald field, and in the natural idiom of his mental speech, he promptly gave it an heraldic turn, thus making each sense play into the other, each indissoluble from the other.

Or perhaps, still cleaving to interpretation within the limits of the Shakespearian idiom of speech, the word may have come to be used by the natural ellipsis of his language. It has already been pointed out that Falstaff "played with flowers." If this was the imaginative starting point of the suggested picture, the word would remain as part of the swift imaginative process. The flowers, the green fields, and the thin white pen would be the order of the thought in the rapid progress of imagination. For interpretation must needs always expound a mind and its working.

It is impossible to miss the weight of this accumulated argument, derived as it is, not from any extraneous hypothesis, but developed from within the very nature of the case: from historical fact, from the likelihood of Shakespeare's instinct of pity, his idiom of expression, his visionary delight in a swift

startling visualisation, from the completeness of sense demanded by the whole passage, from the demands of consistency in Falstaff's characterisation, and from the claims of the First Folio as being the only edition prepared directly from Shakespeare's manuscripts. All this is sufficient, good measure well pressed down and running over, in rejection of Dr. Theobald's fanciful emendation, which, in a greater or lesser degree, violates each of the above standards of judgment. Yet on the strictly calligraphic test the mere alteration of "and" for "on" vindicates itself as against the more elaborate alteration that holds sway in every modern edition without exception—every modern edition, that is to say, that does not purport to be a reproduction of the First Folio. Strictly speaking, such an alteration means only the deletion of a "d," since "an" and "on" are sufficiently similar in most modern penmanship for their distinction only to be judged by the sense of the phrase. And those who have had cause to examine any old manuscript in the Gothic script will not require to have the presence of such a "d" explained. Flourishes abound. The least occasion, or even the lack of it, is taken advantage of for a flourish. Some flourish down from the upper line launching itself beside the "on" before it journeyed upward to completion, would be sufficient to suggest

a "d" to a rapid reader. In this connection it is worthy of note that ordinary writing on an ordinary width of page amounts usually to nine, or ten words of fair length, and that the "y" in the word "way" of the previous sentence is at ten words' remove.

Such details, however, though useful enough as the completion of a demanded sense, are but of little account. What is of considerable account is that Dr. Theobald's violation of the text (a violation, as has been said, that every modern edition has approved) has obscured from us, not only a beautiful and characteristically Shakespearean piece of imagery, but also an eager fragment of personal reminiscence. Nor is this the only instance that we have of Shakespeare's keen observation, retentive memory, and transmuting imagination. But to decline from this on to "babbling of green fields" is to decline indeed. It is not only to decline from a grief that catches at the heart and stifles expression of words, into a mouthing sentimentality. It is to decline from a vision that is sharp and searching into a merely expressive form of words. It is to decline from the poet's eye to the moraliser's mouth. It was a declension worthy of the trim and sophisticated seventeenth century. Yet the declension might have prevailed, and the original beauty passed into forgetfulness,

but for the fact that a musty document came to remind us of what once had been Shakespeare's courtly duty. And the fact that the recovery did come in this way is its own proof that it is just and accurate, and that we have indeed caught back to us the mood in which the greatest of humorists passed to his death in the mind of the greatest of dramatists.

THE PROBLEM OF MR. WILLIAM WATSON

THERE is a fundamental difficulty lying at the basis of Mr. William Watson's work that does not so much accost the novice as it haunts and perplexes the lover and the student. It catches admiration at the very threshold of enthusiasm, and arrests it forcibly. It baulks affection at the very brink of love, to its own discomfiture. There are probably few that have not been awed and moved by first acquaintance with this poetry that earns best the title of distinguished, and still fewer that have not, on later intimacy, found something baffling in it, something difficult to set out, but still something essentially disconcerting and dissatisfying. It is as though the pomp of his utterance had excited the soul to expect a rare repast of grandeur, which, nevertheless, was not forthcoming. And that this perplexity is in Mr. Watson himself rather than in his reader is a conviction that his work brings with it, both in what he has achieved, and in the paucity of that achievement.

It stretches throughout all his work. When first he came to song romantic glamour was in the sky though the morning of materialism was about him;

and true to this romantic glamour he sang of it, his most noble achievement in it being *The Prince's Quest*, which, indeed, in point of length, is the most considerable of all his work. It is throughout reminiscent of Morris; reminiscent, too, of Keats, showing Morris' early indebtedness there no less than his more lineal ancestry from Chaucer. In it he tells us of lands the most romantic and mystical: which is absolutely the very fact: he tells us; yet, however convincingly he tells us, he fails to bring them about us as Keats does in *St. Agnes' Eve*. It lacks magic; it is all spelt out on the page. And romanticism without occult suggestion and mystical colour is foredoomed to failure: it is not romanticism, in fact, however much it boast the name. Yet *The Prince's Quest* has in it that peculiar distinction of Mr. Watson's work from first to last: the single unforgettable line. Such as, for instance:—

“ Along the margin of thy muttering sands ”;

or again:—

•
•
“ and hear

The sighing of the darkness as I go.”

When a poet is discovered putting out an initial volume that contains as its *magnum opus* a lengthy romantic poem, and then after four years' silence giving to the world a volume of over a hundred epigrams in verse, crystallised and polished with

manifest effort after refinement, the situation is sufficiently illuminating. It is Mr. Watson's own criticism of his early work. It is also his decision as to what he proposes to make his later work. He turns from his unriper effort, feeling it as unexpressive of himself as it is obviously unexpressive of the soul of romanticism, and seeks to concentrate, and yet again to concentrate, filling his lines with meaning and making his manner more and more marmoreal. In other words, the William Watson of *Wordsworth's Grave* and *Apologia* begins to emerge. Yet it is possible so to refine, that poetry itself has been refined away; and it is noteworthy that twenty-five years later Mr. Watson seeks to recapture the more aerial and elusive muse, with what of success will later be seen.

But to achieve this compression two things are necessary: a fit vocabulary and a stern regard for form. And that such compression should live, it must step with the metrical mastery of verbal pomp. All these things we see Mr. Watson striving after in these epigrams, and possessing in full flower of achievement in his next volume containing *Wordsworth's Grave*. There are not many poets that possess a vocabulary as wide as Watson's; yet it is not so much distinguished for its width as for the compactness and compression of the words he chooses. They

are not wild with beauty so much as concentrated with meaning. He has foresworn great work in great space; he will try and bring great work into small space. His lines come to wear the value of stanzas, and his stanzas of cantos. Simple structures and short poems, therefore, mark his work; and hauteur of spirit and pomp of utterance its manner of delivery. But thereby it becomes more and more self-conscious; it tends rather to the deliberation of a craft-master than to the fury and fire of inspiration in supreme inevitableness. The subtlety that raises Coleridge to the supernatural, the intensity, awaking the imagery of Wordsworth, the fire of Shelley, all these things must needs be forgone. And the recompense is the echoing line or passage. Such as this epithet for Vergil:—

“ Lord of the incommunicable charm.”

How beautifully it ripples! Or such a passage as this out of *Estrangement*:—

“ Thus may a captive, in some fortress grim,
From casual speech betwixt his warders, learn
That June on her triumphal progress goes
Thro’ arched and bannered woodlands; while for him
She is a legend emptied of concern,
And idle is the rumour of the rose.”

Yet in their reserve there is something chill and forbidding, remaining with the spirit, whether we will

or no, when all their magnificence of speech has died through the air.

Though it lack the divine fervour and riot, his verse at its best has the "large utterance of the early gods"; if inspiration flag a little it comes jeopordously near being rhetoric; and, naturally, when inspiration fails he relies purely on its pomp to see him through, and his hauteur of delivery. Therefore, while his finest passages never precisely fire the reader, his passages of lower order never weary. He leans too securely on his prop of words and their mastery.

His most noteworthy achievement is of course *Wordsworth's Grave*. I say of course; despite the fact that by placing *Lacrimae Musarum* in the forefront of his Collected Poems he seems to elect it for his preference. Fine passages apart, however, as a whole *Lacrimae Musarum* fails. There is a distinct gap between effort and achievement in it. This is largely owing to the fact that the odic structure scarcely suits Mr. Watson's genius: it has not sufficient compactness; moreover, it demands the fusion of passion, which Mr. Watson has eschewed. An ode, so impelled, so dictated by propelling life, will work out for itself periods and paragraphs on which to move forward. A succession of lines, each complete in itself, each arriving at a conclusive full-stop,

nor serving as a platform from which to swing forth on a new aerial flight, such, in fact, as *Lacrimae Musarum* is all too full of, is deadly to odic vitality. Moreover, this poem has an incoherence manifest in it that is irritating. Later, in his *Coronation Ode*, he turns to a similar verse-form, but there, by nature of its theme, classic and marmoreal dignity is alone demanded of him; and it is therefore a success. Here, however, æsthetic subtlety is required, and he cannot give it.

But in *Wordsworth's Grave* we have him at his best. Its quatrains suit him well, giving him something to refine and polish. And further, the theme is one to his own heart. Here he can play the literary critic to excellent effect; and he does so admirably. Whether verse is a fit place for literary criticism is a debatable matter; and again whether Mr. Watson's is a true summing up of Wordsworth is another very debatable matter. It cannot be too clearly remembered that Wordsworth, particularly the earlier Wordsworth, was an essential Dionysian both in burthen of utterance and in personal habits, and no mere contemplative pastor who had for weary feet a gift of rest. Still, all this apart, the poem is packed with the true substance of poetic thought. It is not surcharged with poetic emotion so hot as to be above all thought, like *Tintern Abbey*; we always know

what Mr. Watson is saying and seeing; it is brain work with poetic colour as accessory, rather than pressure of poetry working this fundamental brain-work; nevertheless, vision is alive in it. As for instance:—

“Not Milton’s keen translunar music thine;
Not Shakespeare’s cloudless, boundless human view;
Not Shelley’s flush of rose on peaks divine;
Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.”

This is excellent criticism; it is also poetry, withal we feel that it is Mr. Watson speaking in poetry rather than poetry speaking through Mr. Watson. Sometimes we feel it is Mr. Watson speaking in iambic verse; but this is not often.

And, indeed, to have spoken in praise of him as a literary critic is to have spoken in praise of a fair bulk of his work. It is certain that no poet having something to say, being burthened with the plenitude of a large inspiration, would be, or could be, content with such a state of affairs. And here a near approach is made to that fundamental difficulty of which I have spoken. For Mr. Watson’s poetry causes one to make a very keen analysis, both subjectively and objectively, as to what after all poetry really is. Is it possible for a man to hew him out a most distinguished utterance, compact and resonant, without the flashing eye of impelling inspiration, and yet be

a high poet? When such a charge is brought against him, he complains in noble language that he found fault with

“ because I bring nought new,
 Save as each noontide and each spring is new,
 Into an old and iterative world,
 And can but proffer unto whoso will
 A cool and nowise turbid cup, from wells
 Our fathers digged; and have not thought it shame
 To tread in nobler footprints than mine own,
 And travel by the light of purer eyes.”

This is certainly a modest aim, and eloquently delivered. But is it Poetry: Poetry, the seer of visions, the teller of secrets, and the prophet of Beauty? He says again in the same poem, *Apologia*, in what is probably the supremest passage in all his work:—

“ Be it enough to say, that in Man’s life
 Is room for great emotions unbegot
 Of dalliance and embracement, unbegot
 Ev’n of the purer nuptials of the soul;
 And one not pale of blood, to human touch
 Not tardily responsive, yet may know
 A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
 Than comes of commerce with mortality,
 When, rapt from all relation with his kind,
 All temporal and immediate circumstance,
 In silence, in the visionary mood
 That, flashing light on the dark deep, perceives
 Order beyond this coil and errancy,
 Isled from the fretful hour he stands alone

Nor beeches wish the cedar woe,
But all, in their unlikeness blend
Confederate to one golden end—

“Beauty: the vision whereunto,
In joy, with pantings, from afar,
Through sound and odour, form and hue,
And mind and clay, and worm and star—
Now touching goal, now backward hurled—
Toils the indomitable world.”

(The Father of the Forest.)

The Intellectual interposes, however:—

“Nay, on this earth, are we
So sure 'tis real ascent
And very gain we see?” *(The Hope of the World.)*

Shadowed with this, the Poet wails:—

“Ah, doom of mortals! Vexed with phantoms old,
Old phantoms that waylay us and pursue,—
Weary of dreams,—we think to see unfold
The eternal landscape of the Real and True;
And on our Pisgah can but write, ‘'Tis cold,
And clouds shut out the view.’”

(The Blind Summit.)

Or, to come right to the red-ripe of the matter, he says:—

“God on his throne is
Eldest of poets:
Unto His measures
Moveth the whole.”

In earthly poets, then, one might imagine that something of His spirit ran. But no! They are “some random throw of heedless Nature’s die.”

Is it wonder, then, that the Poet in him is stifled; or that difficulty greets one through all his work? John Davidson endeavoured, with titanic effort and insurgent speech, to construct poetry out of the very elements of materialism; but Mr. Watson's soul is true to the world ideal, to the verities that are loftier than matter, anterior to matter, and eternal as matter is not, but its song is hedged and cramped. He even in verse seeks to argue out the fitness of the things imperious in him; but the world of merely inductive reasoning shackles him. Bondage is through all his work; and, flowing from this, sadness. His *Raven's Shadow* falls over all things,

"Till the starry dance be broke,
Till the sphery pæan pause,
And the universal chime
Falter out of tune and time,"

and in order to break away resolutely from this, he bursts into the curious and magnificent phantasy *The Dream of Man*. He imagines man having conquered all things (by inductive reasoning presumably), and reducing natural laws to his supreme command. He welds the whole wide universe into one splendid scheme, making his habitation in planets and stars. He even and eventually conquers "The Lord of Death, the undying, ev'n Asraël the King." But what is its value? For futility overcomes him again;

and to give existence a piquancy Asraël has to be resurrected to life and power.

Not only, however, does materialism hedge his soul and cramp his spirit, but (so true a son is he of the latter half of the nineteenth century) that worst form of all materialism, polemical materialism. How deadly to poetry this is let *The Unknown God* prove. The wondrous burthen of a star-lit night moves him into the soul-stirring first stanza of that poem; but having delivered so much, he expounds his theme in argumentative polemic of trivial and transient interest.

Herein lies the perplexity of his work. The soul of man feels that poetry is something first-hand and vital; but mere literary criticism and polemic are neither first-hand nor vital. He feels this himself; therefore his utterances are sporadic and his periods of silence lengthy. He once attempted to chase these hours of silence away by pursuing a more elusive and daintier muse. But it was somewhat too late in his poetic day, and the effort being scarcely successful, he returned to his more marmoreal manner, to find that, though something of magic has fled from his verse, his skill is yet all his own, and masterly. He turned to the making of drama; but it lacked vitality for precisely the same reason.

In fact, Mr. Watson's main strength is that of a

supreme craftsman. A careful student of Milton, metrical step and balance have received his most careful attention, with accompanying skill in the choice of words in their music and colour. In this craftsmanship there is only one fault to find; and that is, it is not sufficiently disguised. It is not craftsmanship lying complete and handy for inspiration to use. It is rather craftsmanship proceeding in its own graces and charms.

Yet, this apart, next to Milton I know no craftsmanship so complete in English verse; I know no poet that can make words march with such pomp and skill. In the passage already quoted from *Apologia*, take such three lines as these, and note how he deploys his words in the first two, gathering them together to foot forward martially in the third:—

“ In silence, in the visionary mood
That, flashing light on the dark deep, perceives
Order beyond this coil and errancy.”

Or, by merging two syllables into one long one, what extraordinary value he gives to the word “ flying ” in these:—

“ Again I smite the host at Ethandune,
And drive them flying before me to their hold.”

Or take these of Autumn:—

“ Shall see her gorgeous in the brief
Pomp of the fated reddening leaf.”

But it is not only in iambic verse that Mr. Watson displays his powers. For his *Hymn to the Ocean* an admirable example of English elegiacs.

But it is in his short lyrics that Mr. Watson "is most truly himself. His gem *April* has long since delighted us all. So, too, have *Scentless Flowers* and *The Voice from Inmost Dreamland Calls*, and, among things lengthier, his *Ode to Autumn*. But if any would wish to discover the daintiest chiselling of verse-form and moulding of subdued imagery, let him turn to, and ponder over, *Leave-taking*. It comes over the lips like the softest soul-breathing, and is a final utterance, "in perfect solution" as Pater would have it. There is no problem here, but perfect joy, even though it be the joy of an infinite sadness.

MR. W. B. YEATS' POETRY

THERE is a certain element in Mr. Yeats' poetry, with which it is sometimes interweaved with neat deliberation, and of which it is sometimes compact in its own inspiration, that must always baffle a first reader, and which, in fact, gives it an incommensurable quality that will always remain, despite a number of readings. It is not only that he is concerned with a Celtic mythology, the beauty of which has only lately come into its own: it is rather that he finds himself surrounded by a world at the threshold of which the reason falls abashed, a world inhabited by timeless spirits of this earth whose comings and whose goings neither moral decree nor human judgment can decide, a world, indeed, of Peoples with whom the Celt more than those of any other blood are supposed to be familiar. Like every true poet he is a mystic. But this is more, or less, than mysticism. Mysticism, in its highest significance, is concerned with Beings and Orders that are cosmic and eternal, that are true when material facts are falsehoods, being transient; but these Peoples are attached to earth, and no hint is told of their perpetuity beyond the term of the earth.

From his earliest days he is always seeking to embody these frail spirits in his poetry, and in his younger work the effort to capture them is more noticeable than its success. In the *Wanderings of Oisín* this strange underworld has already begun to live; and if one notices in it a brush-and-palette effect this is perhaps due rather to the epic nature of that poem than to conscious failure. Yet it is true that in his maturer passion the pressure of inspiration would have been too great for epic deliberation to have been possible. For instance, the first appearance of Niamh is somewhat too deliberate for her to shine with the internal glory she would undoubtedly have worn in later years. But she is witching indeed as she comes—

“on the dove-grey edge of the sea,
A pearl-pale, high-born lady.”

The first work of poets must needs always have a particular interest; the more so since they not infrequently turn away with a sated gesture to erect their maturer work in a wholly different manner. It was so with Mr. Yeats. And in the poems lying between the early *Wanderings of Oisín* and the complete and ripe *Wind Among the Reeds* we see him reaching after and studying the form that shall express the glory of his vision. In them the wild

spirits of the air come and go fitfully: shining out in sudden glory in the *Song of the Happy Shepherd*—

“ The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy ” ;

teasing with half-glimpsed, distant beauty in *The Stolen Child*, and dead, dead beyond recall, in *Ephemera*. Such fluctuations prevail, of course, in all poetry; but in Mr. Yeats' maturity even his failures suggest his successes; in his unriper hours they suggest only themselves. The irresponsibility of the Muse, away directly we seek her, will not account for *Anashoya and Vijaya*, which is neither Indian nor Irish, though it purports to be the former. In a dedication to an early volume of his poems he has himself told us how they all came to be; and his words are not only of value in the elucidation of his fragile art, they have a beauty and glory in their own commendation.

“ While I have wrought these fitful Danaan rhymes,
My heart would brim with dreams about the times
When we bent down above the fading coals;
And talked of the dark folk, who live in souls
Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;
And of the wayward twilight companies,
Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,
Because their blossoming dreams have never bent
Under the fruit of evil and of good;
And of the embattled flaming multitude

Who rise, wing above wing, flame above flame,
And, like a storm, cry the Ineffable Name,
And with the clashing of their sword-blades make
A rapturous music, till the morning break,
And the white hush end all, but the loud beat
Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet."

It is in such a poem as this that one realises how deliberate is his attempt to snare the unseen peoples of the earth in the toils of his poetry. In fact, it is possible to say that it is somewhat overconscious. The dark folk, the passionate men, the twilight companies, the blossoming dreams under no tribute to moralities, the embattled, flaming multitude, the music of clashing sword-blades, the white hush at the end of all—these are the substance of all his work; a kind of synopsis of it; the seedlings of his forest of poetry. And the curiously poised delicate metre, how indicative this is of the manner of delivery he was seeking after, and achieving, at this time! He has told us himself, how, in order that his "verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colours of his own climate and scenery in their right proportion" he seeks to make his "rhythms faint and nervous, and filling his images with a certain coldness, a certain wintry wildness."

He understands, indeed, that the peculiar thing he has to deliver has its own peculiar manner. More than this, it is not itself until it has found its own

peculiar manner, for the matter and the manner are so indissolubly married in all Art that the matter becomes the manner and the manner is the matter. For this reason, until Mr. Yeats finds the appropriate manner the matter cannot be delivered. Until he has set it out the artist himself does not know what it is that burns in him to be uttered. And if it be set out faultily, that is to say if it does not inspire in him the careful content of final and perfect utterance, he is apt too much to assault himself rather than his use of vehicle. So we find Mr. Yeats, before he discovers the secret of "rhythms faint and nervous," so irked and annoyed by the presence in his work of the "reds and yellows Shelley gathered in Italy," or, in other words, of sub-conscious imitation of his early master, that he takes to "eating little and sleeping upon a board"!

In a passage of his prose he quotes with approbation Blake's division of the universe into the Real and the Trivial and Transient, the imagination being the sense by which man perceives the former and the processes of the reason being concerned with the latter. In such a division the imagination draws upon all the Great Memory of mankind. Even in the lesser sense this is so. For example, to the reason a rose-bush is no more than a rose-bush; but

to the imagination, fed only by the memory of a life-time, that selfsame rose-bush may stand as the symbol of the breaking of the casket of love, a dusky evening and the tragedy of two souls. Fed by the high eternal memories of the mind the Rose, with some secret inner symbolism, may arise with a new significance from the spiritual world of Eternal Beauty. It is to capture this that he disciplines both himself and his poetry; for he hears the same voice calling as his friend and compatriot Æ. hears: "'Tis the Beauty of all Beauty that is calling for your love."

With what success that discipline proceeds one may gather from a contrast of the following two poems, one from the *Early Poems* and one from *The Wind Among the Reeds*.

I

" I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their day goes over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold."

II

The Song of Wandering Aengus

" I went out to the hazel wood
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

" When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple-blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded thro' the brightening air.

" Tho' I am old with wandering
Thro' hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun."

One gropes; but the other is a finished, complete product. Yet both are wrought out of simplicity, for the thing that Mr. Yeats has to deliver is so rare

that it can only be caught by simplicity heated to the point of intensity. His Art is therefore that of simplicity wrought mystical and magical. It deals only with essences. When he succeeds his success is that of pure delight; when he fails there is either confusion or banality. When he steps out with his magical singing robes flowing about him and his eyes aflame, wonder and mystery quiver in the air; when inspiration falls from him and his eye is dulled, his verse becomes merely commonplace for all its careful craftsmanship. There is never the support of past greatness echoing along the lines where present greatness is not: that which we call Rhetoric. If glory has faded, drabness succeeds.

In the *Song of the Happy Shepherd*, already referred to, he sings—

“ O sick children of the world,
Of all the many charming things
In dreamy dancing past us whirled
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good ”

It is a wise creed, for it is a creed by which wisdom may be captured. And the success of Mr. Yeats' endeavour may be seen in *The Wind Among the Reeds*, for there, in the craft and subtlety of words, he snares an essential beauty with an inevitability of utterance that would defy the cruder activities of

man. Often the poems in this volume are wrought out of the substance of dreams; often the poet distils a haunting mood of waking day in a delicate economy of speech. That is to say, inspiration may come upon the poet unknowingly and flush his verse with her beauty, or the poet may, by a kind of emotional and intellectual discipline, snare her and make her serve his music. It may be undeliberate, or it may be deliberate, for there is often the feeling of deliberation: but seldom in this volume is there that entire lack of inspiration that marks some of his work elsewhere. For example, there is not much of deliberation in the mood that conceived (not the craftsmanship that wrought) *The Song of Wandering Aengus*. Yet the following poem haunts the mind no less, despite the fact that one can perceive the mind of the poet quite deliberately seeking his effect.

“O curlew, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the waters in the West;
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.”

It has all the wild sad beauty of a Galway landscape, when white mists float over brown bogs, with desolate puddles in them, and a grey road runs over towards the distant voice of the sea.

The Wind Among the Reeds is not only the hour of

Mr. Yeats' purest and truest success: it is, indeed the limit of progress in that direction. The thing he sought for from the first, he achieves here: and thereby closes that path for himself, under the pressure of mere repetition. For this mute sincerity has not alone its very severe limitations, its even unpoetical limitations, but it has no less its extreme perils. It has been hinted that he never supports his muse but with rhetoric. In fact, he sets his face very deliberately against rhetoric. Yet it would be interesting to ask what this rhetoric is that incurs his artistic anger. Often there is the uncomfortable feeling that, in a kind of special pleading justifiable in an artist, he identifies the colour of tone or the magnificence of speech with rhetoric. But if the colour or the magnificence be authentic, that is if they arise from true moods of colour and magnificence purely conceived, it would be a violation of all meaning to speak of the result as rhetoric. Similarly, muteness is not always sincere; and in so far as it is not sincere it is rhetorical. One may lean on a simple device of words not less than on a pompous device of words.

It is this that is the peril he has incurred in the continual chastening of his verse. He has chastened out one kind of rhetoric; but he has almost chastened himself into another. In one of his early poems the phrase "rim of the world" struck us as a failure to

express his idea and a dependence on a manner of speech; and more than once, when his meaning has demanded some subtle and ritual word, he has turned aside and used "druid." To be sure, this is in his early work. Yet in the maturity and fullness of *The Wind Among the Reeds*, pure and haunting though the poems be, it is not altogether a happy spectacle to see a poet compelled to elucidate his poems by an appendix of notes, like any learned professor.

It is, however, *The Wind Among the Reeds* that comes as a test. Its very success makes it its own limit of progress. If its manner be not wide enough to embrace all that is proper to the understanding of its vision, by reason of an overchastening, it yet, and even thereby, stands up on the borders of possibility to point a danger beyond. Its muteness may be sincere: it may have spoken its vision in a sincere economy of simple words: but, since processes will continue themselves if made a law of the mind, how will a further refinement bear any poetic vision at all? We have seen, in the two examples quoted earlier, how Mr. Yeats came to purge imperfection into perfection of simplicity. Over against these let a later example be set, and it will be seen that the purging process continues, but that it is poetic vision that has been lost, not imperfection.

" The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and sent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart. There's something ails our co't
That must, as if it had not holy blood,
Nor on an Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shivered under the lash, strain, sweat, and jolt
As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave or dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt."

Like most things said in verse, it tells its conce wiselier far than lies in the possibility of prose; as one need only read it carefully for a sufficient commentary on what has been said. It is indeed true that "the fascination of what's difficult has dried the sap out of his veins": it has dried the poet out of his verse. His "craft of verse" has become a craft for its own sake. The expression takes value from its own skill, and not because it expresses anything. And that is a form of rhetoric. It was not so in *The Wind Among the Reeds*. There the poet's vision was foremost: as it should be, for a poet without a vision is no poet at all, but a clever or an otherwise than clever, versifier. It is not his technique that saves a poet from sterility, but his vision.

One turns, therefore, to his plays with a peculiar interest; for in them his style is challenged to a sterner test. In his lyrics anything that will not turn to magic can be purged away, and even that which is magical may be destroyed in the process; but in his plays the conditions of dialogue and plot compel the presence of much that would not be endured in a lyric. The necessity is not now the necessity of inspiration, but the necessity of speech and explanation. It is the difficulty of all drama; but it is a difficulty of more than ordinary meaning to a craftsman who regards as rhetorical that richness and pomp of tone, that ornateness of imagery, with which Æschylus and Shakespeare met such occasions.

Partly he overcomes the difficulty by so casting his play as to avoid their occasion. One remembers, for example, the opening of *Deidre*. There the exposition and explanation of the past is put into the mouths of the musicians as they speak. In their words together they weave in so subtly Conchubar's preparation of the bridal bed with the telling of Naisi's first wooing of Deidre and Conchubar's consequent thwarting and anger, that one divines the accessories of the issue without actually being told of them. The musing speech of the musicians so fits the chant that Mr. Yeats' verse naturally takes that one scarcely notices the artifice in reading.

Yet artifice it obviously is. Nor is it an artifice that well stands the challenge of acting. Moreover, in the acting it is not so easy to divine much that not told.

In such plays, however, as *Baile's Stand*, or the beautiful *Shadowy Waters*, where the verse is a-gleam with a pale phosphorescent light, the occasion is avoided even more wisely by choosing the moment and its occasion so deftly that there need scarce be a movement throughout that is not alive with intensity. In the former, to be true, there is an occasion when a retrospect is demanded; and it is met by a dramatic grip that gives the play its strongest moment, though it is significant that he should have rendered it in prose. It is when Cuchulain discovers he has slain his own son in the strange man who so unaccountably won his love, and whom he was induced to fight. Cuchulain is wiping his sword with feathers and speaking with the Fool and the Blind Man. He has just learnt from them that his dead antagonist was Aoife's son; and he says:—

CUCH. I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN. None knew whose son he was.

CUCH. None knew? Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN. No, no; I knew nothing.

BLIND MAN. Somebody is trembling, Fool? The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL. It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN. It is his own son he has slain.

It is possibly the strongest moment in all his dramatic work; for we tremble too as we learn so obliquely of the terrible thing that has been done. There is another such moment in *The King's Threshold* where the strength has been wrought out of a sheer power of dialogue. One remembers that Seanchan has determined to bring shame on the King by dying on his threshold, because of indignity done to the high craft of Poetry in his person. The King brings Seanchan's pupils to him that they may bid him desist. He answers their appeal with wild words; and they tell him that hunger has made him fantastical. Looking at them then, he says quietly:—

"Why that's the very truth.

It is as tho' the moon changed everything.

I had even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the words
Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by."

It is a quick tension that heightens the pity and turns the dialogue about to a new course of life.

Yet it is not for such moments of dramatic tension that one turns to Mr. Yeats' drama. He has purged his verse to such effect, and, at its best, made it sensitive to catch the spirit of the shadowy people of the earth, the presences that to him are much the secret beauty of the world, that it will not readily rise to great dramatic moments save of a peculiarly delicate sort. It is this that one means when it is said that he is truly not a dramatist at all. There is an idle and foolish antithesis sometimes employed between the poetic and the dramatic. It is an idle antithesis, because no such antithesis can be said to exist. The highest and purest drama is always poetic, as the drama of all ages that has perpetuated itself proves by being poetic in substance and form. Yet so are the highest of all moments poetic, for the poetic is the divine memory in man. But since the poetic is wider than the dramatic, there may be poetic moments that are other than dramatic as well as those that are truly dramatic. There are moments of dreams, of phantasies and reveries; and it is chiefly out of such moments that Mr. Yeats has wrought the substance of his plays. *Deirdre*, for example, may be cast in the form of a drama: it may, that is, move through its life in dialogue up

dialogue: but truly it passes like a dream, insubstantial and remote; like some tale seen on a tapestry that some gust has caused to billow, while its figures swell up with a semblance of life.

Even *Baile's Stand* is of this sort, despite the moment when the tapestry fades and life nearly breaks through the picture. *The Shadowy Waters* and *The King's Threshold* assuredly are. So it is with such plays as *The Hour-Glass*, *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* and *The Land of Heart's Desire*, some, if not all, of which Mr. Yeats will doubtless turn into verse some day so as to create the dream-mood more truly. There is a very beautiful lyric in the last that is indicative of this mood, even as it is indicative of so much of his work.

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away
While the fairies dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.'"

It is this wind that blows upon all his poetry, in or out of dialogue, giving it its beauty. In the poem

that is the most notable in all his work, it blows through every line even as it blows through the separate reeds in *The Wind Among the Reeds*. a truer sense than in any other play of his *The Countess Cathleen* is a drama: yet, even so, it is more dream than drama. Moreover, it is worthy of note that it is his only play in which he has not chosen to depict one intense moment, but has given a whole movement throughout its full action. It was written in the days before he had so chastened his verse that it could not make beautiful the lower and less intense moments of song. That it should remain, nevertheless, as the most beautiful thing he has wrought is a curious commentary on his effort continually to tighten the strings of his verse that they might catch more elusive musics. There are registers so high that they will not render melodies at all, but only give out notes not greatly dissimilar from one another.

The spirits he has attempted to catch are not the whole of Beauty. They are not of the height or the depth, neither of the length nor the breadth, of Beauty: and it is doubtful if they are of the centre of Beauty, for "no hint is told of their perpetuity beyond the term of this earth." Yet they are beautiful; and he has caught them. It may be true that in a zeal of craftsmanship, in "the fascination of what"

difficult," he has over-refined the verse in which he snared them; but *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *Countess Cathleen*, to instance his purest successes, are like nothing else in English poetry in the beauty that they wear, and that is to say they cannot be supposed to pass from memory.

MR. WILLIAM H. DAVIES

WHEN Wordsworth sought to strike out a new and more natural diction for poetry he achieved two things, which two things became confused in his mind, accounting for much of the confusion, one finds in his famous preface. The poetry that burned him refused to be delivered in the stilted artificial language, and particularly poetic language, he assumed in his day. Its grandeur he felt to be mock grandeur; its mystery, where mystery was a postulate of mystery. Feeling this, with a courage and fearlessness scarcely appreciated at this date he struck it all away and reduced himself to the bare simple essentials of language. This his muse seized on, and made poetry of, eagerly enough. But in the glory of first creative fervour he saw poetry in the vehicle rather than in a transcendent use of the vehicle. Later he perceived the error of this, and we know with what care he turned to the question of style. But in his early wonder of discovery *We are Seven* was sent out with the same gravity and faith as *Tintern Abbey*. Which is not all. For since his date *We are Seven*, as an exemplary of his achievement jointly with *Tintern Abbey*, has received no little

attention. The mind has come to attracting more attention to it than its due is, forgetting that its importance is historic and illustrative rather than intrinsic.

This fact is important, and from its importance is thrown light of criticism on Mr. Davies' work, for it has some kind of similarity with Wordsworth's simpler, less intense, and less prophetic poems.

When he succeeds, his utterance has that singular ring of inevitableness that tells it was conceived, as all pure poetry must be and all great poetry is, in the metre of its delivery. Captious analysis fails to enter the thin edge of its criticism between the matter and its utterance. Craftsmanship has its time and place (chiefly preparatory to inspiration); but this is a higher than craftsmanship. For whatever the thing be worth, high or low, great or slender, there is its finality. This was noticeable in his first volume, *The Soul's Destroyer*. As when, succeeding to a run of lines with nothing to lift them out of the ordinary, one struck on this—

"Her presence then a pool of deep repose
To break life's dual run from Innocence
To Manhood, and from Manhood unto Age,
And a sweet pause for all my murmuring."

This is not metaphor, imagery, or fancy; it is just itself. So with this—

“ And more subdued her voice, as soft and sweet
As Autumn's, blowing thro' his golden reeds.”

Or else one will strike on the sorrow of this, with :
gloom as of a grey chasm telling of the ruin of years—

“ Her once blue sapphire eyes had not a gleam,
As they would never smile or weep again,
And had no light to draw the waters up
Which staled upon her heart.”

There is nothing magnificent about these; nor have they any of wild beauty in them. They do not come to you with poetic empire in their hands: you have to turn to them as to a woodland shrine. But how beautiful they are at that! The marvel of them is that he should so curiously and suddenly step out with power when so much of his journey has been taken up with stumblings and mishaps. It is this curious indecision of inspiration, or, what is even more bewildering, this utter lack of perception as to what inspiration even is, that marks all his work. To see Nature from a curious and whimsically affectionate point of view is not in itself sufficient to create poetry, though it may be a vital assistance to that end. By it the mind may come to penetrate to the true heart of Nature, and learn to abide at that perennial source of all freshness and wide joy and pure felicity; by it the soul may contentedly mingle its essence with the fount of all might and unperturbed

power, might to might, soul to soul, power to power, and so come to achieve the potentiality of high poetry. But to come to the potentiality of poetry in private experience, and to create power of poetry in the experience of others, are two widely different things. This should be a truism, but unfortunately the two things are too easily confused as the overwhelming mass of poetry comes to testify. It is this confusion that marks the fault of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and that opposed to it much of the fierce hostility of such men as Lockhart. It took the quiescent genius of Wordsworth to perceive that the heart of all poetry lay round about us; that in the calm delight of a *Daisy* rather than in the sophisticated striving after *Night Thoughts* lay the essential of poetry. Seeing this, it could be understood how easily he might mistake a daisy for poetry itself rather than seeing it as a symbol to upcall poetry. A daisy is but a wand in the hand of wizard Nature whereby floating visions come upon the seer unfolding the occult destinies and origins of the race. But it may easily so chance that the wand may be there, and the wizard there, and yet no trance come upon the beholder. If such an occasion be transcribed into verse, metrical photography will ensue, but not poetic vision and inspiration: not poetry. Or to fetch instances from Mr. Davies' work, contrast the following—

IN SPRING

" When sparrows twitter in the shutes
And swallows lie upright on walls;
When linnets sing on dancing sprays,
And loud the merry cuckoo calls;

" When leafy trees will not allow
One dot of sky to see their shades;
And, like small insects made of light,
The Dewdrops flutter on green blades;

" When hidden Violets are betrayed
By Primroses—those golden boys;
And everything that has a tongue,
Must fill the air with some sweet noise—

" Then do I bless the hours I live
From cities where dumb Care is found;
My eyes drink beauty all the day,
My ears must suck in every sound."

THE KINGFISHER

" It was the Rainbow gave thee birth,
And 'left thee all her lovely hues;
And as her mother's name was Tears,
So runs it in thy blood to choose
For haunts the lonely pools, and keep
In company with trees that weep.

" Go you and, with such glorious hues,
Live with proud Peacocks in green parks;
On lawns as smooth as shining glass,
Let every feather show its mark;

Get thee on boughs and clap thy wings
Before the windows of proud kings.

“Nay, lovely Bird, thou art not vain;
Thou hast no proud, ambitious mind;
I also love a quiet place
That's green, away from all mankind;
A lonely pool, and let a tree
Sigh with her bosom over me.”

He who runs could have seen and written the first, swiftly and flittingly: the second is born of joy conceived in meditation. Or, again, contrast *In the Country* with the typical stanza—

“No doubt it is a selfish thing
To fly from human suffering;
No doubt he is a selfish man,
Who shuns poor creatures sad and wan.”

Bold and stative as it is, with the curious felicity of so simple a theme as this—

“I hear leaves drinking rain;
I hear rich leaves on top
Giving the poor beneath
Drop after drop;
'Tis a sweet noise to hear
The green leaves drinking near.

“And when the Sun comes out,
After this rain shall stop,
A wondrous light will fill
Each dark, round drop;
I hope the Sun shines bright;
'Twill be a lovely sight.”

The wind of inspiration blows where it lists; and it is typical of his poetry that Mr. Davies does not distinguish when it rustles in the leaves of his verse, and when it does not. Perhaps had he the oblique eye of criticism to cast on himself as he worked inspiration would never have visited him, so ingenuous is his muse. And it is, in a sense, a true instinct in the poet that bids him give more than the purely inspired, for it is by the interpretative light of the lesser that the greater is to be understood. Indeed, it is frequently the uninspired poem that interprets a poet's mind to us more truly than an inspired poem, in the light of which understanding the inspired poem wears mightier and wider significance. For instance, to turn to Wordsworth again, it is obvious that *We are Seven*, with all its frailty, throws a rich light on his famous ode. The poet's inspiration is the inspiration of his point of view, and we must needs understand the point of view before the inspiration can be fully appreciated. How much we need of the lesser work is another matter.

What poetry gains by being suggestive, and so in some measure symbolic, rather than photographic by working, that is to say, through the general memory of mankind, even though this memory have tissues in it so fortuitous as literary achievement, not only his poem on *The Kingfisher* v

demonstrate, but no less the following poem entitled
The Sluggard—

“ A jar of cider and my pipe,
In summer, under shady tree;
A book of one that made his mind
Live by its sweet simplicity:
Then must I laugh at kings who sit
In richest chambers, signing scrolls;
And princes cheered in public ways,
And stared at by a thousand fools.

“ Let me be free to wear my dreams,
Like weeds in some maiden's hair,
When she doth think the earth has not
Another maid so rich and fair;
And proudly smiles on rich and poor,
The queen of all fair women then:
So I, dressed in my idle dreams,
Will think myself the king of men.”

Imagine what the first two lines of the second stanza gain by the simple upcalling of the figure of Ophelia! The “doth,” however, in the third line of the stanza makes this a fitting place to call attention to Mr. Davies' vile habit of using, and depending on, but-tressing “dids.” To support a missing syllable in so helpless a way is as unworthy as it is irritating. And, alas! this shouldering verb is scattered over his work with only too lavish a hand. In pure ballad it sometimes gives a thump and a stump that is invigorating enough; but generally it is due to

faulty craftsmanship, that is due again to men sloth.

Yet this very nudity of diction is part of his attainment. It would not be true to say that he brushed aside the diction that poets, and other poets, have found necessary for the expression of those complicated or intense aspects of beauty that are born of thought and contemplation. It is rather true that he has not been aware of it. Whatever he has is authentic; and that is a rare tribute to a poet. It does not mean that he does not know the past; nor that he is quite uninfluenced by the memory of literature. In fact, we have seen one instance where that memory brings its own distinct beauty into his verse; and there are many other poems that would probably not have been written had Wordsworth and Blake not sung. But his authenticity, his own native sight and song, are yet real possessions. He has approached Life and Nature for himself, and not through others. He has seen for himself; and he has found for himself a certain contentment, however true it is that that contentment has been the result of shutting away the disturbing influences of Life and Being, not by embracing, subduing, and understanding them.

It is when one comes to ask what the result of this approach is that one strikes the chief disappointment

in his work. He may have come for himself; but what has he brought away? He may have seen for himself; but what is it he has seen? In some lyrics, whose life anthologies of English lyric poetry will ensure, he has noosed in his net of verse moments of a very pure, if small, beauty; but in the mass of his work he has done no more than reduplicate the commonplace appearance of things. And this is not enough for the making of Poetry. Nor does it alter the fact that it is wrought in the metrical garb of Poetry. The full scope of his canvas is small; yet, even so, it is only in rare moments of work that he does rise to what, in that abused yet wise word, we call inspiration. He has forsworn carving in the mountain-side. He has elected to chisel pebbles. And a small handful of such pebbles are moments of peaceful joy that have been excellently caught. To praise so small an achievement in the terms of great poetry is to annul all judgment; yet to reject it because it has been so praised would be to miss a very true source of joy.

MR. HERBERT TRENCH

IF some old-time scop, accustomed to the singing of simple great things, of tempestuous love and war, and of mystical responses between Nature and man, with strong untutored song by camp fires, were to be set to the task of publishing his poetry in modern mode and skilled craftsmanship, a somewhat curious incoherence would result. If, however, in addition to this he were to be caught, not alone in the toils of nineteenth century pessimism and negation, but in the nineteenth century worship of merely intellectual processes, the incoherence would become not only an incoherence of manner but would penetrate to the deeper question of matter. The result of the first would be to make his work somewhat gnarled and unwieldy, so packed as to be surcharged, so impatient as to be elliptical and confused; but the result of the second would be to dry the very fountains of inspiration; to make the poet sceptical of all that defies intellectual articulation and intellectual analysis, in other words of inspiration itself.

Such a poet is Mr. Trench. His two main poems are *Deirdre Wedded* and *Apollo and the Seaman*. The first often borders on the inchoate, and for this reason

serves to upcall the wild scenes in which the old-time heroes contended, while the latter, over and above its awkward setting, shows the poet walking diffidently between polemic and song. But in both is manifested that irritation with the bonds of the craft of verse that vitiates so much of his work.

Milton laid the axe at the very root of the stumping iamb of; say, such a drama as *Gordobuc*. With metrical inversion on the one hand, and with the use of elision on the other (a subtler device, this last, and one which showed his careful study of Ben Jonson), he made heroic verse as variable as any possible verse-form. But, with the true instinct of the artist, he was careful to be faithful to the movement of his verse form, and to introduce his variations as qualifications, but not disruptions, of its time-measure. To say that Mr. Trench breaks his time-measure somewhat too frequently is to be short of the mark, for it is often difficult to discover what his time-measure is. Again, much of his work is in stanza form; but he adopts stanzas only to override the limitations they should impose, carrying on his sense through five, six, and seven stanzas at a time. Nor are these unimportant questions. For verse-forms have their laws and limitations, to override which is to make the substance they carry shapeless and bewildering.

An old Saxon scop, chanting his songs in a beamed hall, had eye, voice, and gesture to supplement his meaning, and therefore had no need of metre or stanza. But to claim his freedom for printed verse is to confuse things that differ. One of the results is that when Mr. Trench strictly observes the function of metrical regularity he is apt to be gnomonic. He achieves regularity as Meredith too frequently achieved it—by dropping out words that would have upset the rhythm surely enough, but that chance to be somewhat important to the meaning.

For work of such slender proportions as his to set about with such stout difficulties is a considerable drawback to its intelligent appreciation. Yet it has this advantage, that it invests it with the glamour of might. And when, in addition to this, it has for its subject a tale of strength and valour, of wild mountains and combating heroes, the kinship between the initial subject and its setting out will serve to make the poem so created a notable one. Such a poem is *Deirdre Wedded*. It is his first long poem and it is his best. Taking the great love story of Irish mythology, it gives it a new setting and a stronger one. Moreover, the subject suits Mr. Trench not so much as it suits the manner of his song; and that he should have chosen to deliver it minstrel-fashion through voices of old-time poets singing in different

centuries, is indicative how native to him is this kind of strong untutored song.

The "Voice of Fintan" opens the subject in blank verse that is strong and sinewy. Mellifluity is sacrificed to strength, to its loss as music, but with compensating gain in that it suggests the colour of the scene it depicts. Its very roughness, too, is not unfitting to the theme. But it is rather when he comes to the freer rhythm in which the "Voice of Cir" continues the tale that Mr. Trench finds the space of treatment more proper to him. Naois' ride with Deirdre, fleeing from the court of Connacher through a wild and heavy country, is full of strength, though one would wish that its strength were more tutored to sweetness of music: that it were rather the strength of wisdom than the strength of force. At its worst it is unwieldy; at its best it is bracing and mighty: as when one sees—

"Naois assault the ridge, to the wilderness setting his face
Expectant, unconscious, as one whom his foes arouse;
His heart was a forge, his onset enkindled space,
He shook off the gusty leagues like locks from his brows."

The "Voice of Urmael" takes up the song in stanzas that are awkward to begin with, and are not rendered any the less awkward when Mr. Trench strides from one to another, taking an unbroken meaning with him. The very genius of a poet is to select the fittest

form in which his song may be sung; and to make that form express its utmost. The form is not adventitious; the form should be native to the theme being conceived in that form. For a poet to conceive that it is he who sings his song, and therefore it matters little in what form it is given, is to miss the essential business of creation. It is for this reason the mind catches the similarity between Mr. Trench and an old-time scop. Such an old-time bard sang his songs; but a modern poet cannot sing his songs. He is more than mere songster; he is a creator. He has to create a form that shall suit his songs for him. And if he fail to create such a form, however worthy its subject, the total production will stumble. It is for this reason Mr. Trench frequently fails. We feel it is Mr. Trench singing and that there is something of chance in the fact that he is singing in the particular form we see. Chanted by him to an audience his themes might be inspiriting enough. A dropped word, a redundant syllable, a misplaced cadence, an overflowing meaning would matter little: the demand for form would be sunk in the inspiration of the subject. But the day of the singer is over; this is the day of the creator. Even the modern recitation of verse (a question of no small importance) finds it necessary to express feelingly the music of the form not

than the subject of the song: a thing unknown before!

This is the difficulty of *Deirdre Wedded*, strengthened as it is by a finely conceived subject. But when in *Apollo and the Seaman* he turns to a subject far from inspiring, and bordering on polemic, we receive a poem framed on the model of the *Ancient Mariner*, but with a metre that fails in surefootedness, set in stanzas and defying their setting at one and the same time.

It is rather when we come to his lyrics that we discover Mr. Trench at his best. For a lyric demands form. It refuses to be conceived apart from form. It demands sure-footed metre too. And since Mr. Trench has been confining his attention to lyrics his work has consequently gained just that which it lacked before, conviction. For example—

“ Come, let us make love deathless, thou and I,
 Seeing that our footing on the earth is brief—
 Seeing that her multitudes sweep out to die
 Mocking at all that passes their belief.
For standard of our love not theirs we take:
 If we go hence to-day
Fill the high cup, that is so soon to break,
 With richer wine than they.

“ Ay, since beyond these walls no heavens there be
 Joy to revive or wasted youth repair,
I'll not bedim the lovely flame in thee,
 Nor sully the sad splendour that we wear.

Great be our love, if with the lover dies
Our greatness past recall,
And nobler for the fading of those eyes
The world seen once for all!"

This is as it should be, complete and final! To al anywhere would be to spoil it. Now and then ev in these lyrics of his, however, there are noticea those signs of an unmastered impulsion of so which too often mars Mr. Trench's work. The c ference between an unmastered lyric and a master lyric is the difference between the finality of joy a the weeping of failure. "Come, let us make lo deathless," exemplifies the former; and to it t following may be added, and for reasons other th his excellence—

"Oh birds of the air—
Wild birds, buoyant, vagabond, light—
Streams may have taught you a stave;
But how are ye born so sure of your flight
Hence over worlds of the wave?
Whose mind remembers in you as it weaves
Subtlest of houses to sway with the leaves?
We have forgotten the land out of sight—
We build no house but the grave!"

Out of such a hopelessness and uncertainty, c of such a mood of uncertainty, what great poet shall be wrought? Happily man has not "forgott the land out of sight," though it may be true th some men deny its existence.

MR. ROBERT BRIDGES

THE present day is neither spacious nor restful enough for the fit enjoyment of Mr. Bridges' poetry. This does not necessarily mean that his work is bulky, though, in point of fact, it is sufficiently so. The remark does not deal with the achievement so much as the mood that prompted the achievement. The age deals in excitements; most of them superficial enough, but some few of them meritorious and genuine: whereas, in contradistinction to the age, Mr. Bridges has purged all excitement from his verse. All Art has its essential ritual, whether it be the ritual of pomp for the pursuit of magnificence, or the ritual of subtlety for the achievement of inwardness; and a ritual is the disguise and, at the same time, the articulation of ecstasy, which is a sublime excitement. The chief note of poetry is such ecstasy; and the higher the ecstasy the higher the poetry. Therefore, when we see a poet setting forth with deliberate intention to purge out excitements, the situation is one sufficiently interesting.

It might, perhaps, be put in another way. A fair portion of Mr. Bridges' work is given up to short lyrics, to say nothing of the lyrics that are strewn throughout the body of his dramatic work. Now

the function of a lyric is to strike the mind with single choice ecstasy that shall leave it perpetually enriched, even though the memory omit to register a detailed impression of its cause. The mind passes through a mood of tense joy that it can never utter in disavow. It may be compact of its own emotion or it may deal in the symbolism of metaphor, whichever it is, its business is with a moment of complete ecstasy. Therefore, the expression "placid lyric" is really a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, Mr. Bridges chiefly deals in placid lyrics. Not wholly; for the memory clings to certain exquisite excitements which lyrics of his have aroused. Which, properly considered, are a sufficient condemnation of their company. Take, for example, the following sets of two stanzas, chosen for their similarity of mood expressed in them, and note how a declension in poetic excitement from the first to the second implies a declension of poetic value.

I

"I have loved flowers that fade,
Within whose magic tints
Rich hues have marriage made
With sweet unmemoried scents:
A honeymoon delight,
A joy of love at sight,
That ages in an hour—
My song be like a flower!

" I have loved airs, that die
Before their charm is writ
Along a liquid sky
Trembling to welcome it.
Notes, that with pulse of fire
Proclaim the spirit's desire,
Then die, and are nowhere:—
My song be like an air!

II

" I made another song,
In likeness of my love:
And sang it all day long,
Around, beneath, above;
I told my secret out,
That none might be in doubt.

" I sang it to the sky,
That veiled his face to hear
How far her azure eye
Outdoes his splendid sphere;
But at her eyelids' name
His white clouds fled for shame."

The difference in these two is not the important distinction between one fashion of ecstasy from another; it is the root difference between inspiration and its absence, for inspiration is ecstasy in achievement. To achieve poetry it is not merely necessary to depict an external scene or an internal emotion; and never was poetry better proved to be transcendental and divine than when a poet sought to achieve

it by so photographic a method. Let a poet but do the divinity of the thing he handles, or abjure fervour, and the result condemns him as not having achieved poetry, whatever else he may have achieved. This does not mean to say that all poetry is equally exalted. There is the good that is slight not than the good that is great, though there is a strange and undeniable kinship between them all. For instance, it may be a single, simple, pure emotion passing away on a wave, such as—

“ I love all beauteous things,
I seek and adore them;
God hath no better praise,
And man in his hasty days
Is honoured for them.

“ I too will some thing make
And joy in the making;
Altho' to-morrow it seem
Like the empty words of a dream
Remembered on waking.”

Or it may be something more notable, such as—

“ Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Heaving across the bosom of the urgent West?”

Or it may be the poignant—

“ I will not let thee go.
Ends all our month-long love in this?
Can it be summed up so,
Quit in a single kiss?
I will not let thee go.”

These may all hail each other cousin over the straits of difference; but they would all mutually deny relationship with—

“ Sometimes when my lady sits by me
My rapture’s so great, that I tear
My mind from the thought that she’s nigh me,
And strive to forget that she’s there.

“ And sometimes when she is away
Her absence so sorely does try me,
That I shut to my eyes, and essay
To think she is there sitting by me”;

or his account of some or other river-party. One has to search for his moments of inspiration among his lyrics, for they are not many among the mass of them. Moreover, they are sometimes difficult to find, and for the curious reason that they have superficially the same appearance as their uninspired neighbours. It is as though the calm passage of verse after verse sharpened suddenly and unexpectedly to the cry of intensity, and then passed again into its placid movements. They need to be taken from their context for their full beauty to be seen. But once seen so they cannot fail to be treasured tenderly.

Too often content with a mood that fails from the necessary fervour, Mr. Bridges appears to have lost the power of judging between his moods. The critical

function of his mind seems either never to have been present in him, or to have declined from its activity through atrophy. So when it is remembered that the goodlier portion of his work is dramatic, it brings the whole interest to an acute pass. Dramatic work demands above all things the critical instinct. It means not only the just analysis of emotions in the characters deployed in whatever action is afoot; it means a mind that hovers critically over the spoken word to judge its fitness, in material quality, and quantity. It means also an instinctive sympathy with the mind of the observer, knowing that it is there, and not in the written or spoken word that the action takes place.

It is not possible in a drama, as in a book of lyrics, for a reader to select or reject. It comes as a whole, and as a whole it must succeed or fail. Furthermore, a drama demands just that very thing that Mr. Bridges fails to achieve in his lyrics: a high measure wrought to intensity. It might therefore be pronounced that the poet without critical instinct, without passion could never create great poems in dramatic form; and this is true, so far, with regard to Mr. Bridges, that he everywhere fails except where the structure of an ancient story lies to hand for him to fill in its parts. Let him have the business hand of creating vital beings who shall work

their own ends to a destined conclusion, and we receive such a drama *Palicio*, which he terms a romantic drama. To say that its characters act inconsistently or foolishly is to say too much, for both those characteristics are, indeed, characteristics; that is to say, they imply characters, which, in turn, imply vital beings. But the truth is that, despite some three thousand lines succeeding to them, the names of the *dramatis personæ* yet await actuality.

In *Nero*, in the first part, but yet more in the second part, he overcomes this, and does indeed present his personages with life. He becomes a creator, though it is rather the creation of the historian than the creation of the dramatist. But now it is at the cost of dramatic interest! The story flows on through the first part, and, with a slight change of *personnel*, flows on through the second part. There seems very little reason to discover why it should not flow on through a third part and a fourth part, except that a man must make end. It is not very difficult to create a set of characters who have no destiny to achieve. It is not very difficult to construct an interesting story in which puppets shall dance at the author's bidding. It is the eternal problem to create a set of vital beings who shall achieve a destiny of deeper interest than themselves. And that is Drama.

Even the characters themselves, it must be confessed, fail of dramatic interest, and for a reason difficult to discover. For characters live in the verse they speak; and by the quality of the verse they be judged. Speaking in the sense of craftsmanship it is true that the poet that cannot create such verse cannot create a Hamlet, and the poet cannot create mighty and poignant verse cannot create an Othello or a Lear. Therefore, to say Mr. Bridges has purged out great mental excitement from his verse is to say that he has shut his eyes against potent beings in his dramas, and thereby has abjured the drama that overawes. It is false to say that he feels this himself, and seeks to overcome it. For instance, Almeh in the *Christian Captives* at a moment when the reader's mind is needed to be attentive to her own emotional stress, speaks of the ocean thus:

"Thinkst thou that vexèd monster
Hath any physic in his briny breath
For grief like mine?"

The intention, conscious or sub-conscious, is obvious. It is the same as when Macbeth on the eve of his happenings whips our minds to excitement by speaking of "Heaven's cherubim horsed upon the less couriers of the air." But how different from the one we are whipped to excitement co-equal with Macbeth's own mood, scarcely knowing of it. I

other, we see the attempt, and are left unmoved. It is deeply true that the poet cannot achieve in us a mood. he is not capable of himself; and Mr. Bridges is too contemplative and meditative for those explosive emotions that go to make great drama.

He is even afraid to venture beyond the phrases evolved by the meditative mind, however capable of more eager verse he be. The pioneer spirit entirely lacks in him; and of this a very curious example exists in his wholly rousing and surprisingly boisterous comedy *The Humours of the Court*. The butt of the comedy is a would-be poet, Nicholas by name, who (with the author's intention to make poetry on his lips ridiculous) speaks thus of love's pain—

“ I have compared it to a sunbeamed tear,
Whose single pearl broiders the marble lids
Of some tall Sphinx, that with impassive smile
Dreams o'er the desert; whence 'twas gathered up
Of earthly dew and the pale sparkle of stars,
To fall in silent lightning on the sands;
Which, at the touch magnificent, bloom forth
In irresistible fecundity.
Such is love's pain, as it hath lit on me;
And tintured by it I would dream my day,
Nor count the sailing hour, but when night falls
Be closed up, like a belated bee,
In the pale lily of death.”

It seems probable that Nicholas with a little care and application would, to judge from this extract,

come in time to make a better poet than his creator. Which is a parable; for Mr. Bridges just lacks the pioneer search for beauty that marks this effort as the child of his brain. The closing simile, which Mr. Bridges holds up to much subsequent ridicule is one, nevertheless, that the memory refuses easily to part with, finding undeniable beauty in it, however apparently far-fetched. There is certainly more beauty in it than lives in the somewhat effete *Christian Captives*, save for some passages in Almet's vision of heaven. Spanish soldiers, or any other soldiers for that matter, of the Middle Ages, or any other age, were but little likely to spend their nights and days in slow procession chanting hymns. There is something infinitely truer to life in the "belated bee in the pale lily of death." But it is born of adventure; it is conceived in vigour.

It is obvious, therefore, that his mood and craft are best adapted to dramas conceived in the Greek manner, the sudden and adventurous Gothic beauty being beyond his reach. And his work approves itself. None who have read his Greek dramas can doubt that matter and manner have coincided in this with the choice happiness of success. In order of merit they are *The Return of Ulysses*, *Demetrius Achilles in Scyros*, and *Prometheus the Firegiver*.

these his purged, even bare, simplicity sometimes rises to great beauty, and is always happy.

The subjects, and the order of their events, lie to his hand, and therefore there is no call on his invention. Thus he is free to construct his verse imperturbably. This is not always happy as it happens. For instance, in *The Return of Ulysses* there being but one undivided action in view, the treatment demanded is one of swiftness, of rapidity amounting almost to suddenness. Whereas some three thousand lines intervene between Ulysses' arrival on the island and his victory over the suitors of Penelope. The mind loses patience over his interminable talk with Emmaeus, and with the suitors and their song, because in these the action is not progressed, as dramatic action should be in speech, but hindered. Yet when the end comes, what joy of intensity is produced in us by the calm verse and its patient progress! How beautiful is the language of the maid that tells Penelope how the fight wages without, and how deftly is the coming of Athena hinted, as with electron spear she transforms Ulysses from his beggar-like fashion! She says—

“ He shieldeth himself well, and striketh surely
His foes fall dead before him. Ah! now what see I?
Who cometh? Lo! a dazzling helm, a spear
Of silver or electron; sharp and swift
The piercings. How they fall. Ha, shields are raised

In vain. I am blinded, or the beggar-man
 Hath waxed in strength. He is changed, he is young.
 O strange!
 He is all in golden armour. These are gods,
 That slay the wooers. (*Runs to Penelope.*) O lady,
 forgive me!
 'Tis Ares' self. I saw his crisped beard:
 I saw beneath his helm his curling locks."

Such a passage is faultless, for it fulfils its own conception. It proves that Mr. Bridges', having found his proper theme of song, by that same token has structured verse that must needs endure, being beautiful.

Achilles in Scyros is as patient in its movement, though by no means so lengthy, and is as balanced in its beauty. The choruses, like most of his choruses, are somewhat too apt to be intricate; and they would gain, being in English song, both in cogency and attraction if they stepped to a more definite metre. The involved choruses of the ancient Greek are scarcely adapted to the music sprung from the English tongue. There is, however, a passage in it that rivals the description of Ulysses at fight. It is Lycomedes' description of the Greek fleet at Aulis. Something too lengthy for extended quotation, fragments may yet be given—

" 'Twas such a breathless morning,
 When all the sound and motion of the sea
 Is short and sullen, like a dreaming beast.

The morning mist lifted, and lo, a sight
Unpicturable.—High upon our left
Where we supposed was nothing, suddenly
A tall and shadowy figure loomed; then two,
And three, and four, and more towering above us:
But whether poised upon the leaden sea
They stood, or floated in the misty air,
That baffling our best vision held entangled
The silver of the half-awakened sun,
Or whether near or far, we could not tell.

.
—'twas a fleet of ships, not three or four
Now, but unnumber'd: like a floating city,
If such could be, with walls and battlements
Spread on the wondering water; and now the sun
Broke thro' the haze, and from the shields out-hung
Blazed back his dazzling beams, and round their prows
On the divided water played, as still
They rode the tide in silence, all their oars
Stretched out aloft, as are the balanced wings
Of storm-fowl, which, returned from baffling flight
Across the sea, steady their aching plumes
And skim along the shuddering cliffs at ease."

With them must be placed Prometheus' words when
he says in *Prometheus the Firegiver*—

" I see the cones
And needles of the fir which by the wind
In melancholy places ceaselessly
Sighing are strewn upon the tufted floor."

These are not trophies that Mr. Bridges has won;
they are beauties that have come to him in meditative

calm, and through him to us. They came when he least sought them. The plays in which they appear, it need scarcely be said, are not all of equal excellence. Nay, they sometimes fail of a unity of effect—which is not a fault that can be found of *Demeter*, for this is the most coherent and orderly of all his works in its structure. It is, moreover, the loveliest treatment in English of the loveliest legend of the Greeks, and takes its place, with unostentatious calm, among the handful of masks in English literature that the passage of Time can neither mar nor stale.

GEORGE MEREDITH: THE PHILOSOPHER IN THE ARTIST

THAT no man may make his work other than an effluence of himself is surely an axiom of literary criticism hard to gainsay. Much has been heard, for example, of the "impersonal aspect" of Shakespeare's work; yet when all the dust of words has floated by, and the noise of battle is over, this fact remains, that the lover of Shakespeare feels quite sure of his man. Details of character, certain intimacies of emotion, remain unravelled: but then who knows so much of his dearest friend? And what matters it so long as the main lines are sure, since it is these main lines that are more indicative of the man than transient vagaries? Even with this most impersonal of artists his lovers know there are certain things that may most positively be affirmed of him. Who, for instance, believes it possible of the creator of Horatio that he would take generous patronage from an Earl of Essex, later to turn and rend him merely to advance his own forensic career?

Ben Jonson, who knew him, declares that he sees Shakespeare's face shining in his works; and we, who know him only in his works, feel this to be deeply

true. Yet whatever doubt may chance to exist here, in the case of a man of a fine sensitiveness and an ardent aspiration indeed, but with no co-ordinated philosophy, no such doubts exist with regard to Meredith. Here is a man with a strong philosophy serving for backbone in his life, and serving for backbone in that work which is the main issue of his life. A creator of vital men and women indeed, throwing them off with their own life and personalities, bidding them breathe their own air, think their own thoughts, have their own aspirations, fight their own battles; and yet a creator greater than his own creations, who in the very fashioning of them gives us a subtle clue to his judgment of them, and who in framing, more or less arbitrarily, the course and consequence of their actions passes judgment on these actions and the personalities that spun them.

Therefore with Meredith the task is easier than with others, for in certain portions of his poetry, and in certain excrescences embodied in the action of his novels, he has more or less clearly articulated his philosophy. And in his prose, apart from one or two earlier novels not specially characteristic of him, this philosophy is set in action. To say this is not to derogate his work as literature; for indeed all literature is philosophy, somebody's philosophy, set in action: or rather, to speak more truly, philosophy

is the desire to know Truth as Truth, while literature is the aspect of the spacious edifice of Truth from the standpoint of temperament, the standpoint of the creations adjusting the standpoint of the creator. This is not to say that Meredith's novels are entirely given over to the exposition of his philosophy. Yet that this philosophy does indeed play a vital part in the novels is surely indisputable; and to it he has given his tacit assent by explaining that his poem *The Empty Purse* is admittedly not poetry, strictly so called, but an exposition of an idea for which he could not find room in the novels.

What then is this philosophy? One word utters it; a word that is its birth and its aspiration, its touchstone and its philosopher's-stone, its crown and its citadel; a word that threads delicately through his whole work; which, when we strike upon it, enables us to know that we have come upon something that is most peculiarly its author's, and which, rightly understood, should furnish the clue to much else. "Earth" is this mystic, this magic, word; an ordinary word, indeed, but coming to us clad in a glory which Meredith has newly robed upon it. Apart from his virtue as a creator of vital beauty and vital character, indeed in and through this virtue, the position he has at last won for himself and the understanding he has yet to find depend much on

the value he has set to this word, and the philosophy of life he has robed around it. To read his novels merely as tales of interest is to enjoy them truly; but it is to miss their peculiar nutty flavour. To glory in his heroes as men, and to love his heroines as women, is to have heart possessions for ever; but to love them apart from their meaning to him is to lose their special lustre and radiance. Whereas his poems defy recognition or appreciation save as jewels in the special carcanet of his philosophy. There are few poets, the details of whose work live less for themselves than for their glory as a whole: each striking its particular sparkle to light up and aid the radiance of another, and they in turn mutually brilliant to vivify the scheme in which they are set.

“Earth,” then, is the word: and its correlative is “Man.” If Meredith’s work be a sumptuous Gothic cathedral, then its altar-piece is his exquisitely chiselled poem *Earth and Man*. It is a marmoreal poem; and like most marmoreal work, despite its dignity and stateliness, it is cold and hard. But it contains in seed nearly all that is elsewhere manifest in bough and foliage. Here we are introduced to Earth; and here we are introduced to ourselves, our race, her choicest and most noble product—

“On her great venture Man
Earth gazes.”

From Earth Man has sprung; and from nowhere else: she is his sole 'origin, and the goal toward which he aspires is the goal toward which she aspires in and through him. Virtue and truth have only meaning to him in relation to this origin and in relation to this goal. The path was through brutes and savagery, the memory and potency of which live yet in his veins; and Progress lies toward the noble brotherhood of Man. The journey entails much suffering: or, rather, the suffering is the flagellation by which the journey is to be accomplished. It matters not; pain is to be embraced, though not necessarily to be sought; disappointment and grief have to be endured: not with stoical ox-eyed indifference, but with that keen brain-sensitiveness that looks attentively to see what law of our Mother Earth we have broken that has brought this thwacking on us. Seeing it, knowing it, we are taught our lesson; nay, we ourselves have deliberately to learn our lesson, that we may go on our way chastened, humbled, and the more determined to advance on our road. The journey, however, is not unbroken. Man often enough has turned aside from the path; he has more often shrunk from the labour and pain of the journey, evading it by finding consolation in legends and visions. But Earth does not lose hope; she has faith in her great venture; indeed she must not lose

hope, for apart from him she has failed; he is her great justification—

“Through him hath she exchanged
For the gold harvest-robcs, the mural crown,
Her haggard quarry-features and thick frown
Where monsters ranged.

“And order, high discourse,
And decency, than which is life less dear,
She has of him: the lyre of language clear,
Love’s tongue and source.”

So he sings in two of its most fragrant stanzas
Yet he is not only her justification in himself, and
in his march upward to the light; but no less when
he turns about and introduces order and an ordered
beauty into his Mother’s own “haggard quarry
features.” For it is no wild untutored Nature that
wins Meredith’s special love. Something on this
shines in a passage describing the magical *Woods of
Westermairn*.

“here, their worths exchanged,
Urban joins with pastoral;
Little lost, save what may drop
Husk-like, and the rind preserves.
Natural overgrowths they top,
Yet from nature neither swerves,
Trained or savage: for this cause:
Of our Earth they ply the laws,
Have in Earth their feeding root,
Mind of Man and bent of brute.

Hear it: is it wail or mirth?
Ordered, bubbled, quite unschooled?
None, and all: it springs of Earth."

Progress is the order of the journey: from Earth, inspired and propelled by Earth; in Man, through Man, guided and ordered by Man. To achieve this he must neither seek to woo other destinies than this she has set for him, nor must he set his love on fair legends of the past. If he do this, then she must needs scourge him to his task again. For in truth she gives scant sympathy for sorrow and frail encouragement to dreams.

"Not she gives the tear for the tear:
Harsh wisdom gives Earth, no more;
In one the spur and the curb:
An answer to thoughts or deeds;
To the Legends an alien look;
To the Questions a figure of clay."

So he sings in his *Faith on Trial*; proving indeed that this was a very Faith with him, consolatory in the deepest sorrow, an inspiration in the hour of stress and the day of anxiety. Sorrow is no luxury to such a man, nor is disappointment a mournful theme, though he glories in them indeed with a stern and strange glory. They are the means of growth and occasions of progress; and he finds in his Earth the symbols and lessons of this. Is it Winter, a time of the year that—

“damps to the bone,
Narrows the world to my neighbour's gate;
Paints me life as a wheezy crone”?

Then this is “seedtime”; Spring is on its way, and
this is its preparation—

“Death is the word of a bovine Day,
Know you the breast of the springing To-be.”

Is it “Hard Weather,” blowing gustful, keen, and
biting? Then, says he—

“Such meaning in a Dagger-day
Our wit may clasp to wax in power.”

For—

“Behold the life at ease; it drifts.
The sharpened life commands its cause.
She winnows, winnows roughly; sifts
To dip her chosen in her source:
Contention is the vital force,
Whence pluck they brain, her prize of gifts,
Sky of the senses! on which height
Not disconnected, yet released,
They see how spirit comes to light,
Through conquest of the inner beast.”

His whole Nature Poetry is saturated with this idea; over-saturated in fact, to its detriment as an ingenuous and living tissue of being. What this progress is, and what the measure and standard of it are, briefly may be stated both negatively and positively: positively as the acquisition of Brain-power, that which differentiates, and marks progress, from the brute;

and negatively as the elimination and eradication of Self and Egoism.

We are not concerned with the rights and faults of his perception; nor, now, with the virtue of his faith in Brain-power. It is sufficient to say that he sets it over against the dominion of the sensations; or, as he puts it, with a more questionable designation, Heart-rule. "Ah, what a fruitless breeder is this heart," says he in his *Ode to the Comic Spirit*—

"by turns a lump
Swung on a time-piece; and by turns
Acquiring energy to jump
For seats angelical; it shrinks, it yearns;
Loves, loathes; is flame or cinders; lastly cloud
Capping a sullen crater."

He will none of it. "Let Brain-rule splendidly tower!" is his phrase; and it is worthy of comment that this Brain-rule, this victory over Heart-rule, is very much akin to the icy spirit of monasticism, as he himself sees a little later in the same ode; for he speaks of this—

"Light of the mind, the mind's discourse,
The rational in graciousness,

.

as yet disowned

Save where some dutiful lone creature, vowed
To holy work, deems it the heart's intent;
Or where a silken circle views it cowed."

One remembers that, in his last novel, this same victory of Brain-rule that drove Carinthia to tend the wounded, drove her unhappy husband to scourge himself to death in a monastery.

Yet it is the negative aspect, this scourging of self, that might seem more positive than the positive itself. For now that we are moving on the higher places of thought it is obvious that a more delicate instrument than pain, a subtler scourge than sorrow, is needed. And it is found. It is found in that famous exposition of the Comic Spirit, and of the operations of this elusive faun, that is Meredith's peculiar property in literature. Not only has he given us precept and exposition; he has himself exemplified the operations of his Ariel-spirit in that masterpiece of subtlety *The Egoist*: every page of which peals with silvery laughter swift and scintillating, every chapter of which is vivid with mirth too delicate for the stout guffaw, too essential to be handled, so rare and elusive as almost to escape with a smile, volatile everywhere and piercing always.

This is the deft flail that, says Meredith, shall whip out the Ego standing ever in Man's destined path of progress: this is the flail, and this is its especial function. He would have men not merely unselfish, but selfless; personal and vital truly, but holding this personality and this vitality at service for his

fellows, and, more essentially, at service for the generations to 'follow, thus absolving himself from any taint of Egoism. In his exquisite *Lark Ascending*, where the very irresponsible, rippling gaiety of the lark's song seems conveyed to us in the beat and measure of the poet's verse, Meredith sees the bird singing so; not thinking of self and free from all taint.—

“ Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way,
Like yonder voice aloft, and link
All hearers in the song they drink.
Our vision speaks from failing blood,
Our passion is too full in flood,
We want the key of his wild note
Of truthful in a tuneful note,
The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality,
So pure that it salutes the suns
The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.”

It might perhaps be said that, let him extol as he may, or as eloquently as he will,

“ The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality,”

the abiding truth remains that such songs are not sung out of the lips of intellectual philosophies. But accepting his mood, expanding and expounding it,

the lark's song is thus free and representative because he knows, and not 'alone knows but instinctively obeys, the secret laws of Mother Earth. Self" may play, but self must play within those laws: claiming liberties outside them, is retrogression; is not only retrogression, but sets up an incongruity, the perception of which is the basis of humour or pathos, each being distinguished from the other more or less by the standpoint adopted. And here steps in the Comic Spirit with its subtle flail!

The general perception of such incongruity from the standpoint of mirth is Humour: Humour in the comprehensive sense. If it then attack the emotions, finding outlet in "laughter holding both its sides," or in that tender smile brimful of loving tears, it is humour, humour in the specific sense; if it attack the moral indignation, fetching out the whip that scathes or the mirror that reveals, it is satire; if it touch the founts of whimsical reserve, catching up a spirit playful yet purposeful, not going deep, but keeping firmly upon the surface, it is irony; but if it fly swift to the brain, evoking laughter that is aerial, and subtle to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, free of all grosser elements, then this is Comedy.

Meredith himself has given us an historical and critical, if not final, exposition of the meaning and

uses of the Comic Spirit. In its most famous passage, unforgettable once read, he says—

“If you believe that our civilisation is founded in common sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, when contemplating men, discern a spirit overhead; not more heavenly than the light flashed upward from glassy surface, but luminous and watchful; never shooting beyond them, nor ‘lagging’ in the rear; so closely attached to them that it may be taken for a slavish reflex, until its features are studied. It has the sage’s brows, and the sunny malice of a faun lurks at the corners of the half-closed lips drawn in idle wariness of half-tension. That slim feasting smile, shaped like the longbow, was once a big round satyr’s laugh, that flung up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The laugh will come again, but it will be of the order of a smile, finely tempered, showing sunlight of the mind, mental richness rather than noisy enormity. Its common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men’s future upon Earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees

them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting' dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or ruined with conceit, individually or in bulk—the Spirit overhead will look humanly malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit."

"Men's future upon earth does not attract it." No, for a healthy Mother is the happiest augur for a fair child; and Man's To-morrow is born of his To-day. It is Meredith's faith in the future that bids him see to the virtue of the present. It is his faith in Progress that bids him consolidate our past. His faith is in our Civilisation as the present measure of our progress hitherto. We can hear his own voice over Dr. Shrapnel's lips speaking of Society as "Our one tangible gain, our one roofing and flooring in a world of most uncertain structures built on morasses. Towards the laws that support it men hopeful of progress give their adhesion. If it is martyrdom what then? Let martyrdom be. Contumacy is animalism. The truer the love, the readier the

sacrifice! Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity 'run counter.' Obviously, for To-morrow is null and void if To-day be thwart Nature, or if it be not in the line of the progress that Earth has set for Man.

It is easy to raise innumerable criticisms. Questions raise imperious brows and ask to know if a rather too comfortable a faith is not given to cant definitions of Civilisation; and if these ideas of destiny are indeed set in the midmost of Man's nature. But there is no doubt that, given Meredith's standpoint, his is an exhilarating and stringent tonic of a faith, even to those who believe that Civilisation is a colossal failure.

Laws there are, stated in Nature, of sanity and health, whose due observance bring in their train nobility of aspect and inspiration of prospect. This faun-like Comic Spirit hovers above, quickly to note Man's departure from them; and with its long, lithe intellectual whip to flick his defalcations. Unhappily it is too often true that they who are defaulters are of so tough a hide that they are impervious to the sting. "Sword of common sense" he calls this comic perception. How if its would-be victims claim sole possession of common sense for their own extravagant ways? An unlooked-for manœuvre this, surely! Yet the earnest will en-

deavour to swell to conformity to these laws; and no better way can he 'do this than by prayer. The accepted notions of praying for exceptional benefits to be received Meredith cannot abide. To him prayer is a discipline, a bringing oneself into line with laws that are the final wisdom for the soul. To quote only one of his sayings in this regard, Dr. Shrapnel (who is no less than Meredith himself, and therefore set to caricature)' writes" to Nevil Beauchamp: "Take this, my Beauchamp, for the good in prayer, that it makes us repose on the unknown with confidence, makes us flexible to change, makes us ready for revolution—for life, then! He who has the fountain of prayer in him will not complain of hazards. Prayer is the recognition of laws; the soul's exercise and source of strength, its thread of conjunction with them. Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol; the source of superstition." But while Prayer is for the wise and earnest, the flail of the Comic Spirit for the dull and careless; and the glorious brotherhood of Man, founded on rule of Brain and the despotism of Common Sense and Stern Joy, is the goal of both disciplines.

Even the death of dear ones, the surrender of rosy ideals of the past, calamities in domestic life of affection, must not disturb or deter; nor must we be led aside from the path by visionary glories or des

tinies the proof of which is not seated in Reason, that prime function' of Brain-rule. 'Man must be great, self-possessed, and calm; vibrant with passion, but with passions schooled to order and discipline. This is Meredith's affinity with the Classic Spirit; not an affinity of facial resemblance, but in kinship of actuating principle. Besides his, indeed, the classicism of Swinburne is academic and virtuoso. He himself sees it. Of his *Woods of Westermain*, which are symbolic of his thought, he says—

"Banished is the white foam-born
Not from here, nor under ban
Phoebus lyrist, Phoebe's horn,
Piping of the reedy Pan.
Loved of Earth of old they were,
Loving did interpret her."

This, then, is the Altar-piece of the Cathedral; worthy of the most detailed examination, for nearly the whole Cathedral is framed to its ideal. To understand it is to understand much else that is difficult: it is to understand his Style and the Presentation of his novels; is to understand his conception of his Art as a Novelist; is to understand the ruthless conclusions to *Richard Feverel* or *Beauchamp's Career*; the nature of those background characters, his especial heroes, and their development through the novels; the lesson of *Rhoda Fleming*, *One of Our Conquerors*, *Lord Ormont*, *The Amazing Marriage*;

the discipline of Evan Harrington; the scourging of General Ople; the failure of such a splendid character as Victor Radnor; the development of such nature characters as Sandra and Carinthia; the special charm of his heroines and their reason of the apparent coldness of some of them, especially the later born of them; the meanings of *Shagpat* and *Farina*; the catastrophe of *Modern Love*; and the supreme exposure of Sir Willoughby Patterne, not to speak of the mighty Richmond Roy.

Of some of them only it is possible to speak; and obviously the first must be the style and presentation of his novels: his Art, in other words. To speak arbitrarily one might say that the poet's business is with ideal Man, Man with divinity and eternity streaming over his brows; Man, if need be, at conflict with society, bowing only to eternal rules; and therefore Tragic Man: Romeo, Hamlet, Othello Lear: not necessarily simple men, but rather complex men fused to simplicity by the grandeur of their passion, and seen so. The novelist's more particular function is with Man in terms of Society and therefore more divisible to the critical eye. One is Man seen from within; the other Man seen from without. But it has been seen that Meredith has to do with Man ideal and yet social, social and yet ideal: Man progressive and progressing; the son of Earth and the

creature of society: Man the supreme fact, and Man a profound problem, clothed with destiny and learning from circumstance. Therefore he is both Poet and Novelist; depicting from inwards and viewing from outwards; lyrical and critical. Style being but the vesture of idea, the cincture of thought, his style must therefore be lyrical and, critical; and this not in successive breaths panting quickly upon each other, but in one and the same breath. Language can scarce hold this; and it must needs strain the limits of grammar and clarity. So far as it can be affected, Meredith seems to have done it; and therefore it is that he fascinates even when he most annoys. It is a new form of Art he has achieved. For his presentation is like his style, the compaction of the inner emotion and the outer aspect. In his style the metaphor revealing the inner man is followed hard by the metaphor criticising him seen in relation to others; and the presentation leaps from one lyrical and dramatic action to another, with interludes that adjust the proportions and bearings of the emotion achieved. For to Meredith, as we have seen, Man is a mighty figure, but one who has attentively to study and learn in order that he may achieve a mightier and a truer figure.

So with the conclusions to *Richard Feverel* and *Beauchamp's Career*. Lucy's death is cruel, pitiless

to the bursting of strong tears; but it is pitiless and cruel even as Earth and Life are pitiless and cruel. There is no forgiveness of sins in Life: the deed done, the consequence is irrevocable. Otherwise how should we learn if the consequences of our action may be avoided? Lucy's death was Richard's punishment; but it was also his lesson, his opportunity for nobler growth. This is the teaching of Earth to Man. With Beauchamp's death it is somewhat different. So far as he wished to bring Next week into To-day he was a fanatic; though, like most fanatics, he was noble and sincere. Meredith would not have us fix our eyes on To-morrow, but To-day. Beauchamp would not learn his lesson and so his work was spoiled before the end of the book. More would have been restlessness, would have even been irritation and therefore reactionary. Thus he dies; dies doing a noble, self-sacrificing deed and so grace is found.

The bearing of Meredith's central thought on those strong men hovering in the background of so many of his novels is obvious. They are his special loves: the toll of them wakes memory of his tenderness over them: Austin Wentworth, Vernon Whitford, Merthyr Powys, Tom Redworth, Matthew Weyburn (though he was in no background!), and the splendid Dartrey Fenellen. Not all of them are successful

some are, and others come perilously near being, prigs; but to feel distaste sometimes at Merthyr Powys is no obstruction to a warm glow at Tom Redworth and an entire love of Dartrey Fenellen. They are nearly all men who have drunk of disappointment, and eaten of sorrow, at the table of adversity; nearly all of them are of poignant experience, having taken the tuition of life—chiefly, be it noted, in some early matrimonial misadventure that had bitten memories into them, throwing an incidental light of how Meredith came by some of his own philosophy. But it is their growth and development through the novels that forms so fascinating a study. Compare the tenderly wise but somewhat bloodless Austin Wentworth with the full-blooded, passionate, strong Dartrey Fenellen. It is worthy of meditation in conjunction with the growth of Meredith's philosophy: corrective, moreover!

So, too, with the development of character in those two great nature women of his, Sandra and Carinthia. To follow the progress of Sandra of Wilning Wier to the Vittoria of La Scala is a lovable study: the progress of the Carinthia of "It is my husband" to the Carinthia of "No more of husband for me" is not so lovable, for, though she is often touched with awe, yet she remains chilling and unsatisfactory despite it all. Yet we can trace in both of them the

hand of the poet who wrote, in his hour of deepest adversity, "Smite, Sacred Reality!"—though it is permissible to ask whether Carinthia does not finally turn away from Reality, the truer Reality of a deep and noble change in her husband. Yet they are both women who have been lapped in Nature, not in Society. When their hour of trial comes, disillusionment sinks slowly into their beings; and the result is they are purged, not soiled; wounded indeed, but made, not broken. Nevertheless, a change has come on them; their whole-heartedness and purity, their simplicity and the bright transparency of mountain brooks that they initially have, clear and unquestioning, go; while maturity, worldly-wisdom and clear-eyed grace comes on them. "Which is only a way of telling you that the great result of mortal suffering, consciousness, had fully set in: to ripen; perhaps to debase; at any rate to prove," say their creator, speaking of the change in the first.

We cannot but regret the change. But Meredith makes it apparent that he does not. Heart-rule, the basis of simple intuition, says he sternly, must give place to Brain-rule, the basis of Reason. In Sandra the balance of the two is gracious, and we applaud the result; but in Carinthia the domination of the latter leaves us chilled. Moreover Sandra's deference to Merthyr Powys satisfies the heart; while Carin

thia's infatuation with her frigid brother defies any attempt at advocacy. In it all we can trace Meredith's characteristic philosophy.

These two may suffice to introduce us to the rest of their sisters by the same creator's hand. And a wonderful sisterhood it is! The ripest, fairest, and most diverse since Shakespeare's own family set out on their triumphant way. But while Shakespeare's children lived in that lofty world where nationality is not, Meredith recognises and expounds nationality to us. English Clara Middleton or Cecilia Halkett, Irish Diana, French Renée, German Ottilia of the ideal age, Italian Vittoria, Austrian Anna von Lenkenstein, they all come to us hand-in-hand; and hard would that man be who could resist them. Yet they are all Meredith's own peculiar property, with the die of his imprint on them.

In *Lord Ormond and His Aminta*, Matthew Weyburn wisely advocates the training of boys and girls side by side so that each might acquire something of the special virtue distinguishing the other. Or as the protagonist sings in *Fair Ladies in Revolt*—

“Sir, get you something of our purity,

And we will of your strength: we ask no more.”

This is the path of mutual progress; and we can see this strength shining in Meredith's heroines: knowledge and strength, such as win Nesta Victoria to our

love. No man has done more for Woman than Meredith: Man and Woman co-equal in their several spheres, each assimilating the virtues and beauties of the other, this is his idea of Progress. It is likely the weak-kneed may shrink, for as he says "we have not yet rounded Cape Turk." But his heroines come to convince us of wisdom. Yet this freedom and interchange are not only necessary for progress; they are vital and necessary to Society, the instrument of progress, for, he says, as deeply as truly, "When the veil is over women's faces you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous, and the Comic Spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst." Without a free intellectual womanhood there cannot be Society. Therefore there is no play for the Comic Spirit; and Man has not even started on the path of Progress. While to convince the would-be decorous, the Super-sensitive who are the Hyper-gross, Meredith's women step before us demonstrating the sweetness of their womanhood and the virtue of their sex. That some of them are over-cold is unhappily sometimes more than a suspicion; yet this is possibly not the fault of the achievement-to-be so much as the harshness of the intervening process due to man's perversity.

Shagpat, the first of his prose works, is a fanta

declaring what was to follow: declaring, too, in what manner it was to follow; for though it has not the maturity of experience that was to follow thirty-five years later in *One of our Conquerors*, nor the crystallisation, detail, and intellectual prospect of the later poems, nearly all that is characteristic in Meredith's philosophy is there, wrapped in the mystifying folds of symbolism and allegory. Shibli Bagarag is the man of his heart; and Shagpat's Authentic is the begetter of Superstition, of Ignorance and Sloth, that must therefore be shaved. How it was shaved, and with what of difficulty, do they not know who have read thereof in the pages of the book? It is sufficient to say that, before the hero can succeed, he must first have his thwackings.

"Ye that nourish hopes of fame!
Ye who would be known in song!
Ponder old history, and duly frame
Your souls to meek acceptance of the thong.

"Lo! of hundreds who aspire
Eighties perish—nineties tire!
They who bear up, in spite of wrecks and wracks,
Were seasoned by celestial hail of thwacks."

The subtle scourging of the Egoist, whenever he be found in Meredith's works, has a very obvious connection with that philosophy, being, in fact, as has been said, one of its essential supports.

Given by the Ballad Sen
in the Ballad Sen
in the Ballad Sen

Willoughby Patterne's ordeal, for example, is haustive, and of the highest heights of Comedy; his is the true Egoism, active no less than passi The bringing low of the mighty Richmond Ro a creation that is to Meredith what Falstaff was Shakespeare—is in the region of high Humc Humour “with lights of Tragedy in it.” The fail of Victor Radnor is, however, pure tragedy; there are few moments in Meredith so terrible or chastening. So, too, the discipline of Evan Harr ton, and the cruel exposure of General Ople, h their part and lot in the same connection. I not that Meredith deliberately makes them alv serve the lesson he would point—though more o than not this is so, so self-conscious an artist is It is rather that his philosophy is, as philosop usually are, the expression of his personality, he cannot avoid its active interposition in the he has to tell.

In his later years, it is true, he became obse with some of its aspects. He even declares c gorically that his desire is to work a “change in pu taste” by his works, coveting that as “the flowe wreath” of his ambition. Yet it was always pres and, indeed, one may see it emerging in his ea life. The tragedy of *Modern Love* is undeniably own tragedy; and it may be traced definitely to

identical cause. Does he not himself say, in the stanza that is the pivot of its action—

“ Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince
The facts of life, you still had seen me go,
With hindward feather and with forward toe,
Her much-adored, delightful Fairy Prince ” ?

If one takes *Modern Love* and *Shagpat* as the beginning of his work, and *The Egoist* as its centre and pivot, Meredith's philosophy is seen to give a very definite unity to the total result. For it cannot be forgotten with what a trilogy it closed. Nothing is more characteristic of the man than the fact that he concluded his life's labour with his eye bravely looking into the spaces of the future. It has been seen that his whole faith in the Destiny that Earth has for Man centres in Man as a whole: that is to say, in women not less than men, and in both as they come into line together, each partaking of the other's nature. And once the fact of sex be introduced, it is clear that his attitude towards marriage becomes a test of his faith.

In *One of our Conquerors*, *Lord Ormond and His Aminta*, and *The Amazing Marriage*, therefore, he faces this; and like the sane thinker he was, he holds the balances poised with wonderful equality. He will not be pressed to rash decisions. He only cries, “ The subject is too much in darkness; air it;

air it!" In the meantime he holds firmly by words through the lips of Dr. Shrapnel: "Contum is animalism." For is it not his faith, however di we may agree with him, that "it is the first condi of sanity to believe" that "our civilisation is foun on common sense"? Therefore, however well su Victor and Nataly may be to each other, they broken to the dust and ruined, while behind tl looms the triumphant figure of Mr. Burman as representative of an outraged society. It was indeed, with Edward and Dahlia in *Rhoda Flem* though there the picture had not the same c application.

It is an iron creed: but it is not all his cre *Lord Ormond* and *The Amazing Marriage* had follow; and in the former the reverse of the me is discovered. For "Laws," says he, "are necess instruments of the majority; but when they gi the same human being to dust for their maintenai their enthronement is the rule of the savage Deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot b society based upon such conditions. An immolat of the naturally constituted individual arrests general expansion to which we step, decivilis more, and is more impious to the God in man tl temporary revelries of a licence that nature se checks." And to that dominant his closing t

novels are tuned. In the latter of them a hapless and unhappy marriage is broken by mutual lack of understanding and sympathy: barren to nature and society, to Earth and Man. In the former the two who stand apt for one another, who are ripe for the highest service to Earth and to Man, have to challenge "the necessary instruments of the majority" in order to complete that fact. Matthew Weyburn has to claim Aminta from another who is her husband; and it is significant how he does it. "My own soul," he says, "we have to see that we do—though not publicly, nor insolently—offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law." It is a characteristic speech in all ways, for one remembers that Matthew Weyburn holds his place among those characters that are Meredith's especial heroes.

And it is Meredith's closing word. That it should bring us to the very feet of the old and eternal challenge between "Divine law" and "good citizenship" is profoundly interesting to the thinker who believes in other and more mystical destinies and origins for Man; but this remains outside the scope of a pure exposition. However one regards Meredith's philosophy it cannot be denied that it is severe, wholesome, and stern. to an effete day like a well-

tuned string. He tuned himself to it; and Earth and Man were his two inspirations always. Fittingly and bravely it closed with "the rapture of the forward view": for his philosophy, although over-intellectual, was never a thing apart from his personality. It dominated him; saturated him: it dominated and saturated his books; and there probably never was a writer whose novels, good and full enough in themselves as they were, more demanded a proper understanding of the Philosophy in which they were placed, and which they set in action and exemplified.

CHARLES DICKENS AND THE NOVEL

IT is when one takes pen in hand to write of Dickens, especially when faced by an occasion such as the centenary of his birth, that the true praise of him emerges. Detraction's voice has been heard; and so ruthlessly that no detail has escaped attention. His pathos has been dismissed as maudlin; his characterisation has been called grotesque and exaggerated; his style has been derided as no style at all in the cant meaning of the word, as shapeless and frameless, degenerating often into an uneasy sing-song of halting metre; his craft, for all the care of his scheming, has been scoffed at; his art has been put aside as untrue to life; and even his humour, that which of all things one would have thought would have been left to him, has been called rudimentary and crude. It is not difficult to see, in each particular criticism, what is meant: and to see a criticism is to admit its justice, given its point of view. But criticism is the faultiest of all instruments. It is the function of criticism to be analytical; and there is no one thing in the world that cannot be analysed to its degradation. Analysis is too often the coward's subterfuge for escaping the responsibility

of manly judgment. Such judgment proceeds, not by way of analysis, but by vision, which is the perception of a synthesis. And it is conceivable that one might find no virtue, or little virtue, in any detail of a work of art, of an achievement of the creative imagination, and yet find oneself strangely thrilled by the whole and total effect. It is certainly almost impossible to decide what contribution any one detail, good or bad, makes to the total effect that is the only thing that, in the end, matters.

For example, it is lamented that Wordsworth had not the critical faculty to see what was good in his work and what was bad, so that he might have suppressed the bad and left the good in all its possible loveliness. Criticism (that has always seen so well what is good and what bad in Literature and the High Arts) has declared that to Wordsworth all were of the same value in his work: that he put out a bad poem with all the solemnity and sense of its importance as a good poem. And, in that, Criticism has spoken better than it thought. For to Wordsworth (or to Blake, for that matter) each poem was indeed of the same solemn value; because each poem was regarded as a separate contribution to that most important synthesis that he struggled to fill in and complete. He was not, like Herrick, so much concerned with the making of separate poems as with

the delivery of a vision; and in the utterance of that vision each poem was important. This Wordsworth felt; and, did we truly examine ourselves, we would find that we do so also. The Wordsworth of the Complete Works takes his place in the front rank of English poets, with Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley for companions. The Wordsworth of Matthew Arnold's selection falls back behind Keats and even Byron.

Thus it is always necessary to be assured that one has seen a man's vision, or that one has perceived the particular quality of his artistic attempt, before it is even possible to speak of the faults of his workmanship; for it may so happen that what may, on its own merits, appear to be a grave fault may be a necessary adjunct to the attainment of that vision or that artistic attempt. It is this that the mind perceives in the case of Dickens, even as it is this that enables us to discover the true praise of him. It has, for example, been laid to his charge that his characters, in the main, have no semblance to reality; that they are grotesque and exaggerated. It would be interesting to contrast this assertion with the constant exclamation that one meets in daily life that certain people and certain actions are typically "Dickensian"; as though he were the court of appeal for life, instead of life being the court of appeal for

him. Yet on its own merits the criticism is four to be illuminating. It is meant to be destructive but one suddenly recalls that all the great characters of the world's literature are either grotesque exaggerated. If Bumble be overdrawn as a warehouse official, he is not more overdrawn than the immortal Shallow as a Justice of the Peace. Samuel Pickwick, Esq., be grotesque as a wandering merchant, he is at least not so grotesque as the inimitable Don Quixote as a wandering knight. We do not remember Sancho Panza or Panurge or the Antient Pistol because they are imitations of Life but because they are grotesque examples of what Life can give us out of its exceeding riches. We do not admire Achilles or Hamlet or Falstaff, each in his own way, because he is like the thin thing around us that we are pleased to call Life, but because he is a splendid, or, if we will, exaggerated, example of what Life could be if we were content to trust. They are, strictly, creations; and we hold them in memory not because they are a mere mimicry of the smaller side of us, but because they remind us of the splendour and wonder and laughter that reside behind the small show that we present to the outside world. They do not portray us to ourselves: they reveal us to ourselves. For Art is the Great Revelation.

When Dickens, therefore, created Bumble, he did more than merely ridicule or shatter a system. To ridicule or to shatter a system is, relatively, a small achievement. It truly is a remarkable fact about Dickens that he did succeed in bringing about reform in several matters that urgently needed reform. That is to say, he succeeded in having a system that had worn itself into decay supplanted by another system that was as yet new. But reform, like most matters political, is in itself worth no more than the paper its enactment is printed upon. Dickens may have succeeded in dismissing the Circumlocution Office by the power of his laughter; but the new office that took its place would soon become another Circumlocution Office. He may have succeeded in abolishing the coarse brutality of Mr. Squeers; but there is many a schoolboy to-day who, were the choice given him, would considerably prefer the coarse brutality of Squeers to the refined and solicitous cruelty under which it is his lot to suffer. While Man remains the same, one system, however word-perfect, is as valueless as another, however word-imperfect. And the fact that Dickens succeeded in effecting certain substitutions of systems is no tribute to his Art, but rather only a testimony to his amazing and almost unexampled popularity. But when he created Bumble he did more than shatter a system.

He illustrated what is the essential weakness of systems. Bumble stands up as the eternal type what it is in human nature to become under the joint influence of power and importance: a fact that we admit in the daily habit of our speech; for the word "Bumbledom" is our continual attestation of the truth of the vision of Dickens. On him depends, not alone the execution of the system that Dickens scourged with his bitter laughter, but the execution of all other systems whatsoever. Bumble is at one time a Creation and a Revelation.

In this way Bumble may stand as a sign and ensample to us of his creator's work. He, and a score of others even truer to the heart of life than he, are almost nearer to us, and therefore more real to us than we are to ourselves. It is because they are so near to us that we are apt to lose a distinct sense of their outline and proportion. And we are won by them accordingly. It is for this reason that so many have stumbled at the works of Dickens. They have regarded them as Novels; and in the Novel they have grown accustomed to compilation rather than to creation, to portraiture and depicture rather than to revelation and illumination. The Novel, as an Art-form, has been notably complaisant; and it is for this very reason that it is a perplexed question as to how truly the Novel is a durable Art-form.

Matter that, in the severe and searching discipline of Poetry, would not for a moment be suffered an entrance, passes without let or hindrance into the Novel, and is even accounted an adornment to it. But the adornment is the chief weakness that attends the Novel in its attempt to pass muster in the austere ranks of Art; what was thought to be a gain is found to be a loss; that which we have called, in a phrase that we have been careful not to expound, "fidelity to life," has been the very thing that has obviated the necessity for that creation on which all Art depends; and the result is that the Novel has always been the thing of an age, and not the thing of all time. The *Iliad*, the *Divina Commedia*, Shakespeare's Tragedies, *Paradise Lost*, *Prometheus Unbound*—all these are as young as the day on which they were written. But Fielding and Smollett, even Thackeray and George Eliot, belong to their own time, and can only be approached through the age in which they were written. One is, in the true significance of the word, creation; and the other is that compilation that is often miscalled creation: and therefore one wears divine youth on its brow; whereas the other is like a stage-piece in a foreign tongue, that cannot truly be known till the foreign tongue be mastered.

Now this is the peculiar praise of Dickens: that, with all his shortcomings (of which he had not a few),

he, with Cervantes, Rabelais, and Bunyan, has lifted prose into this divine youth, this eternal significance, that has been thought the special prerogative of Poetry. Even in the face of their achievement it is hard to conceive of prose as other than journeyman toil, a perishable medium: without that achievement it would be in a poor way indeed. So much is this the case that it is no strange thing to hear such a character as Sam Weller being spoken of as "a poetic creation." And so, in a manner of speaking, he is. It matters little that he rose out of a Victorian hostelry, as Pantagruel out of sixteenth-century France, Sancho Panza out of post-Romantic Spain, and Christian out of Puritan England. It is not what they rose out of, but what they rose into. They rose, each of them, out of a particular age, even bearing its particular brand and currency; but they rose into a perpetual significance that we call Poetry.

So we arrive at another of the faults that Criticism has discovered in Dickens' work. It is complained of him that he lacks skill of craftsmanship, and that his books are structureless; that, having begun, as begin they must, they continue without order and conclude without reason: so that even those who have undertaken his defence have been compelled to concede the criticism, and to ask in return why they should ever end.

The criticism, as criticism, is well placed; but, in the manner of criticism, it has endeavoured to judge the works of Dickens by laws other than the laws of their own being. Those who have advanced it have considered his books as Novels. That is to say, since the Novel is as yet without adequate definition, certain standards have been raised, that prevail in their utmost rigour only with a small portion of the whole field of prose literature, and an attempt has been made to make them the rallying centre of a vast division of it. Thomas Hardy is the supreme example of the craftsman who has introduced into prose literature somewhat of the technique, in a necessarily loosened form, of the Drama (or, in Architecture, since he was once an architect, of the classic arch, which is much the same thing); and the result has been truly astonishing. Yet who would think of judging Rabelais, or Cervantes, or Bunyan for that matter, by a law so alien?

Thus it was no mere chance, but something of a divine instinct, that led Dickens to write his first book in the form of *Pickwick Papers*. It is unnecessary to go into a discussion of all that preceded the writing of the book. It is enough to say that Dickens would have satisfied the demands of his publishers equally well had the "Papers" been shaped and disciplined into an outline as orderly and as shapely

as the best. But his instinct impelled him otherwise; and the result is that we do not think of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* as we think of *The Return of the Native*, but rather as we think of *The Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha* or *The Inestimable Life of the Great Gargantua*. Nor does it avail to throw up the word Novel in defence or in attack. There are those who say that Cervantes is the father of the modern Novel, even as there are those who say that *Pickwick Papers* is no Novel. The truth is that the Novel, according to the protestations of some of its own exponents, is not so much a definite Art-form as a hotch-pot. It would be fair to say that the Novel is always novel.

Pickwick Papers is therefore almost something of a talisman in Dickens' work. Where he becomes most "Pickwickian" there he becomes most himself, and his inspiration is most sure; and when he has least of the peculiar quality that marks those Papers, even though it lead to a result so fine as *Great Expectations*, one feels that, with all its strength, it lacks the peculiar and perpetual significance that gave eternal youth to *Pickwick*. There may be more strength in the latter half of his work: there may be less of bathos in it and more of maturity and circumspection: but the truth remains that the full magic of the first has become dimmed in the second. This

ay best be seen when some similar quality marks both an early and a later work. For instance, both *Nicholas Nickleby* and *A Tale of Two Cities* are melodramatic; but the glitter of the first is a magical glitter, whereas the glitter of the second is sometimes perilously near like tinsel. And this, despite the fact that *A Tale of Two Cities* is more reserved in strength, and therefore more instant in its appeal, than anything Dickens ever did.

In all the earlier portion of his work this strange quality, this quality of perpetuity, of poetic achievement, prevails in its fullest power. We do not remember *Barnaby Rudge* because of its historical, or unhistorical, attempt to recount the matter of the Gordon Riots, or *Oliver Twist* because of its attempt to shatter a Poor-Law system, any more than we remember *Gargantua* or *Pantagruel* because of their endeavour to burlesque certain forgotten ecclesiastical abuses, or *Don Quixote* because its author (who of all men most lived a life of romantic adventure) sought to make romantic adventure perish for ever in the soft fire of his laughter. None of these stand with their feet planted on the revolutions of Time, for Time to bear past us and away. They are all, by a subtly transmuting touch, lifted into the air, to float there eternally while Time hastes steadily on beneath them.

Yet, although, as book succeeds book, the breath

of change is seen passing over the first inspiration, although what one may call the poetic quality of *Pickwick* is seen to be becoming more and more spent until in *Dombey and Son* its colours are false and its ring is unreal, yet it is not till one comes to *David Copperfield* that one finds a change in full operation. There it is actively at work; and for an obvious reason. For in *David Copperfield* Dickens had made up his mind fully to unloose the autobiographic instinct that resides in every man. He had, in fact, determined to make the story of David Copperfield the tale of himself; so much so that he was pleased beyond measure when it was pointed out to him that the initials of David Copperfield's name were the inverted initials of his own. And consequently his creative faculty had to move within a limited scope. He was harnessed to circumstances; with all the restrictions that that meant. Either inadvertently, not knowing that it meant a cleavage from his past way of work, or deliberately, as the result of Criticism, with its cry of impossible characters, he set himself the task of compilation instead of creation; and having once put his hand to the work the habit grew on him, till, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the book he died at work on, he came to lean wholly on skill and secrecy of plot, so removing himself to the utmost extreme from *Pickwick Papers*.

In this very book *David Copperfield*, however, his instinct may be seen in revolt from the work of compilation he set himself. It is always so, more or less, the end of his work; but here it is most marked. For, as the story opens and proceeds, David Copperfield's personality begins to be built up and to expand. It is the intention of the book that this should be so; it is, in fact, the prime cause and purpose of the book; but such an intention, limited by fact and the circumstance of relation, is clearly the very thing most calculated to extinguish the subtle poetic reaction that went to make *Pickwick Papers* so eternally fresh and rare. But the old instinct asserts itself; with the result that *David Copperfield*, as a book, grows in interest as it proceeds—and grows in a peculiar way. David, instead of becoming more and more important and personal, becomes less and less so; till at last he becomes no more than was Nicholas Nickleby, a name-centre around which, in varying clusters, the real personages gather. As he declines the others burgeon and swell: Micawber becomes more truly himself; Traddles takes his true proportions; Uriah becomes powerful instead of merely monotonous; Dora comes into being—and punch is drunk, as punch was drunk in *Pickwick*. It is these things, and these people, that lift the book into evergreen memory; not the mere narration of

he life of David Copperfield, who matters little enough, although his history purports to be the dim autobiography of Dickens himself.

But such things and such people demand, clearly, their own adequate atmosphere to move in. It is this that has at all times been the most stubborn difficulty in the path of poetic creation. Characters that are compilations of ourselves, no more than imitations of that life of ours that we present to the outward view (which passes with the passing of the outward view), can live and move in scenes that are copied from daily habit. But it has always been the problem with the creator to create with his characters, with his people who are ourselves and more than ourselves, being revelations of ourselves, so adequate a scenery for them to move in that there shall be no shock to the contemplation. Among the poets pure and true, Shakespeare, for example, pitched his scenery at some remote distance of time or place: in Venice, where Othello could find a freer play for his tremendous personality without striking against some incongruity of scene, or in ancient Britain, where Lear could shake the earth. With Homer and the Greek dramatists the necessary elevation was given by the thought of War and the ritual of religious ceremony. Among those who wrote in prose, Bunyan created a whole new world; Cervantes transmuted

the Spanish landscape into a new strange earth; and in our own day Thomas Hardy has fashioned a new individual province for himself, which he has named Wessex, and where the very towns have been given new names in order to lift them away from us.

Dickens' answer to this problem is particularly interesting; and nowhere is it better illustrated than in the subtle change that so slowly passes over *David Copperfield*. The nature of it can be discovered by first turning to one of the earlier novels, such as *Oliver Twist*, or to such a phantasy as *A Christmas Carol*. In both of these the scenery is the streets of London; yet though the streets are given their habitual names, by which they can be identified, they are changed and altered; something has so transmuted them that we scarcely think of them as streets of London at all. It is not sufficient to say that the times have changed; and that therefore what seems to us a transmutation might have been but a faithful portrayal. There is no reader of *A Christmas Carol* or *Oliver Twist* but must come to the conclusion that there never at any time was such a house as that in which Scrooge lived, or such streets as those through which he walked, or Fagin or Bill Sikes walked. The internal emotion is sufficient to indicate this. But, apart from such internal evidence, there is external evidence; for Thackeray's streets

have nothing of that wildness or that remoteness from commonplace reality. Nor is it possible to say that the dream-phantasy of the *Carol* is responsible for one, as the overdrawn, melodramatic nightmare horror of *Oliver Twist* is responsible for the other. There is the same strangeness, the same wild and fantastic remoteness, about the scenery of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. And the result is that the London Dickens has drawn has no relevance to the London that now is or ever was, save in an identity of street plan; so that those who talk of seeking out "Dickens' London" are, in a manner of speaking, in search for something that can never be found.

In *David Copperfield*—in, that is to say, the book that brought about the change in his way of work—this peculiar significance of atmosphere is an interesting study. For it has been seen that a change passes over the book as it develops itself. The first decision to write a simple straightforward narrative, compilation rather than creation, never really leaves the book, influencing it to its conclusion; but the older inspiration, that made *Pickwick* so truly a book by itself, asserts itself as the narrative proceeds, transfiguring it. Now side by side with this change in characterisation the scenic atmosphere begins to change also. It is a thing difficult to define, for it

is a thing that one either feels or does not feel. The scenery at first is as sharp and as definite as the green that Betsy Trotwood guarded with such zeal. It becomes dimmer and more fantastic as the book grows older.

Certainly whatever be the result in *David Copperfield* itself, the result in the sequence of Dickens' books, before and after *Copperfield*, is clear. It has already been illustrated, in another connection, by comparing the first and last of the books, *Pickwick Papers* and *Edwin Drood*. But it may even be illustrated by taking the two books immediately before and after *David Copperfield*: *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*: in spite of the fact that the latter of these is better than the former, because the change is seen coming in the former, whereas it has already arrived in the latter. *Dombey and Son* is, admittedly, a failure among Dickens' works; *Bleak House* is admittedly a success. Yet it is true that in the first we may divine the poetic creation at work, however much it may have failed of success; whereas in the latter we miss its peculiarly transmuting power, and are therefore constrained to admit that the success is of a different order, and of a lower order. The first is a failure, but a high failure; the latter is a success, but a lower success. And *David Copperfield* stands as a landmark between two periods,—not only :

landmark, indeed, but actually one of the causes of the change.

This is not to say that that which gave, not only such distinction, but such significance, to Dickens' first period, vanished thereafter, never to reappear. A man may never deny, or abjure, his most distinctive self; and Dickens could never wholly write either such distinguished compilation as that of Thackeray or such strong compilation as that of George Eliot. In the sure, though subtle, matter of scenic atmosphere, taking that for a sign of the hand at work, he is to be discovered to be the same throughout his work. His streets, his houses, and his skies, never become wholly those of actuality; but they become measurably near actuality in his later work, whereas in his first fervour they remain immeasurably remote. And as his streets are so are his people also, for it is at the demand of his people that his streets are transmuted.

Dombey and Son is, however, interesting for another reason. A man's typical failure is always illustrative of his special weakness; and this is even more than usually true in the case of *Dombey and Son*, by reason of some of the causes of its failure. As is well known, this was the first novel in which Dickens found his flowing invention failed him. He complained of it, in its early stages, that, as he worked at it, he could

not induce it to start itself and move forward. The truth was that his early success had intoxicated him, and his successive tours through America and the Continent had brought restlessness into his blood. That is to say, through one cause and another, his genius had to be compelled to do its work; and genius, when so compelled, may yet display qualities most distinctive of itself, but it will display them in colours that are false and in an emphasis out of proportion to the occasion. And this is just what happens in *Dombey*.

Thus, as in *Pickwick* one may best find what is the peculiar praise of Dickens, so in *Dombey* one may discover his peculiar blemishes and restrictions. The colours, we see, are garish; and the characters, in attempting to achieve dignity, fail hopelessly. The scene between Carker and Edith Dombey, for instance, is melodrama unmitigated and crude; yet throughout it we can perceive the attempt that was not achievement, by virtue of which it continues to live. The truth is that dignity was outside the compass of Dickens; and that therefore exaltation and the high purging ritual of tragedy was impossible to him. Always about the figure of Don Quixote there is an incomparable dignity; always over his brow there shines the radiance of a high exaltation; with the result that intermixed with our laughter at the sight

of him there are always those rare tears that ennoble us. We are not only broadened by reading Cervantes; we are heightened. But there is little of this in Dickens; indeed, there is nothing of it. He not only failed in *Dombey and Son* to achieve dignity, but he failed in that attempt generally throughout the body of his work. For example, in *Oliver Twist* he made a clear bid for Terror. Now Terror is ever one with mysticism and exaltation; Terror is only felt by the soul in its moments of awe and dignity; because in Terror it is faced by something that transcends the common round of its experience. But such a mood, such a dignity and awe, is alien to Dickens (or, more truly, Dickens is an alien to such moods), and the result is that where he attempted Terror he achieved only Horror, which is fantastic and crude.

It is this that is meant when it is said that his style is no style at all. When it is said that his language never stiffens itself into structure, it is meant that his characters and scenes never erect themselves into dignity. They are each manifestations of the same inability in the creator. Similarly when it is said that in none of his sentences is there a haunting music or mystical cadence, it is meant that his sentences tell out all they have to say on the page, empty their whole cargo on the wharf, because their author is so

little in correspondence with the world beyond worlds that he both can and must say all he has to say. He is never in labour to express the thing just beyond his reach. His difficulty is, rather, to avoid saying the thing well within his reach twice over. Those magic sentences in the world's literature that tell us so much more than they say, are never his, because the Furthermore is for ever beyond him. Faced by Death, we get the death of Paul Dombey. He attempts Tragedy, and achieves Melodrama; he attempts Terror, and gives us Horror; he attempts Dignity and we have stilts; he attempts mystery and we receive a detective story; he attempts an historic revolution, and we have a few squalid characters and the trial-scene of Charles Darnay. And so he is always thrown back, when attempting to wing high, by the irrevocable concave of his limitations.

It is always necessary to see a man's blemishes clearly before his praise can be truly said. On the other hand, it is always necessary to see a man's cause of praise before his blemishes can be discovered, for it may happen that what appear to be blemishes are but the natural reverse of his virtues. With Dickens it was so. If he could not win his way up to the heights he certainly made the earth most wonderful. If when he attempted the mystica

he only achieved the fantastic, confining himself to the fantastic he made it so wonderfully fantastic that he raised the whole result into the realm of true creation. If when he attempted dignity he succeeded only in giving us stilts, in giving us people who always went through life on 'stilts, he makes them so incredibly funny that he fills our minds with laughter. So, too, if in desiring Tragedy he falls into Melodrama, in desiring Melodrama he transmutes it into something that is both rich and strange, something blown upon with the breath of creation till it takes a new and perpetual life.

In his earlier work up to and including *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote books that we call Novels, in a poverty of expression, but which are novels no more than the works of Cervantes, Rabelais, and Bunyan. In his later work Dickens took up the same pen (seeing that it was the only one he had), but dipped it in a different ink. He wrote Novels, comparable with those of Thackeray and George Eliot. Whether his novels are better or worse than those of his contemporaries is a matter of opinion. That is to say, the comparison exists. But in *Pickwick*, and the books following hard upon *Pickwick*, there is no comparison, because the things are not alike. We treasure *Don Quixote* as we may treasure *The Heart of Midlothian* or *One of Our Conquerors* ;

but we do not compare them, because they work in different mediums. And it is on these earlier books Dickens establishes his fame, because it is in them that he is most himself. The later books very largely take their excellence from the wind that blows on them from the earlier inspiration. For in them, as always, Dickens created immortals. He always, in some degree, reveals us to ourselves in his characters; and therefore, as they gather round us, and we call each by name, we feel that the fame of their creator is very safe in their keeping.

THE FAILURE OF THACKERAY

ALL the great Victorians have passed from among us. For in no true sense of the word can Thomas Hardy be called a Victorian. We may sit beside him perhaps in a theatre to-day, and we may notice the hand of age on him, proclaiming him as one the splendour of whose days fetches back to the time when Browning, Meredith, Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot were in their height of fame. But a man's tribe is a matter of ancestry, not the hazard of environment; and by that infallible test Thomas Hardy is discovered to be an alien among those that we call the Victorians, recognising a certain bond among them that he has not. His very choice of an alien form is an outward symbol proclaiming the difference. We think of *Adam Bede*, *David Copperfield*, and *Pendennis*, and we see in each of them, through their individual distinctions, a certain common spirit uttering itself in various fashions. We go on, and in the infinitely richer, more various work of one but lately gone from us, we see the same spirit articulating itself in Evan Harrington and Harry Richmond. But there the semblance arrests itself; and by that token we may know the Victorian

age is finally closed and completed, awaiting yet the final summary of its achievement.

One by one, then, the great names of that age are stepping to the arresting challenge of their centenaries; and among them, William Makepeace Thackeray is the first of the novelists who has to undergo this exacting ordeal. In a certain sense it would be just to say that the age was chiefly characterised by the special glory of the Novel, in spite of the fact that the names of Tennyson, Browning, and, remotely, Francis Thompson are to be included in it. Yet it must be remembered that the first two of these names in poetry themselves gave witness to the priority of the Novel in the fact that they obviously shaped much of their poetry having the Novel in mind. It is difficult to imagine *The Ring and the Book* or *Maud* being written in any other age but one chiefly addicted to the Novel. Yet in the very matter of form the Novel is again distinctive, and for a wholly different reason. It may be safely said, for instance, that such novels as *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *The Newcomes* have been seen for the last time. To this result Thomas Hardy has contributed as much as any. Strictly, it may be true that the Novel derives primarily from Bunyan and Cervantes in final indebtedness, but actually Dickens and Thackeray, as the chief makers of the nineteenth-

century Novel, reach back through Scott no further than Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett. From them the inspiration came, and from them came, too, the rambling, formless fashion of the final result. But now the mystic word Architectonic has been breathed over a disordered, yet somewhat splendid, chaos; and so the parts have begun actively to arrange and fashion themselves, and a final, well-ordered, and, it is to be hoped, not too exclusive a cosmos has begun to loom ahead for the Novel. Novelists have already begun to speak, with an adequately bated breath, of "mastering the medium," and with that word we may see at once how far we have travelled since Thackeray and *Vanity Fair*.

Thus, save for one triumphant exception, it happens that in celebrating Thackeray's Centenary we are also taking our leave of him as a Novelist. That does not seem to say, necessarily, that there shall be no more novels as long as *Vanity Fair* or *Pendennis*: it means, rather, that however lengthy novels may be, it shall be required of them that they shall proceed with the matter they have undertaken to tell, and that if their author is possessed of the very legitimate desire to tell us the thoughts touching the weighty things of Life that his matter has awoken in him, he shall convey them preferably in the colour and happenings of his narrative, or at least cause

them materially to explain and progress the business in hand. In this it is sometimes difficult to keep patience with Thackeray. His prolixity is not the fault of an abundant narrative: it is rather the fault of the showman (and, it must be confessed, too often the impertinent showman), who mingles with his characters, not to laugh with them or weep with them, but chuckle unhappily at them, with sidelong glance, or sneer openly at them to their faces. Nothing can be imagined more calculated to irritate the mind than this. We can abide the voice in our ear that excitedly explains the course of the action to us. We can even tolerate the showman who seeks to aid our sense of illusion—as moral reflections and subtle expositions and diagnoses may well do. But such a showman as this but excites our impatience and stirs our distaste, because he, even he whose business it is to throw a glamour of desirable illusion about us, is also in league against us to destroy it by his cynicism.

This faculty was ever prevalent in Thackeray's work. It has been said that in none of his novels is there a character for whom we are not sometimes stirred to contempt. Harry Esmond (his creator himself said it) is not a little of a prig; Beatrix, Esmond in his most dignified and most manly of moments turned away from himself, as

heartless and vapid for all her brilliance of charm; Major Pendennis is of the world worldly, and empty at that; even Colonel Newcome only holds us completely at the moment of his death. To say that the fault of this lay with Thackeray himself will seem to be like announcing the obvious, since it was he who made them. But the statement is true in a subtler way than appears to be the case at first flush. For if ever one of his characters seemed by any chance to be shaping for the noble, at once the showman would step forward and seek to make him or her appear lugubrious by some or other unhappy suggestion of mixed motives. This was so when Thackeray was engaged depicting the gay and heroic. When, therefore, he turned to a show of Life that was in itself of questionable repute, the result was to immerse the reading mind in an odour and flavour of things that it turned from in distaste. After a continuous and lengthy reading of *Vanity Fair*, a fierce south-westerly gale on hill-tops, or a crystal frost, or pine woods in spring when young buds are awake, are required to purge and clarify the mind again. There is nothing impure in Life or on Earth save the minds of men; and therefore we feel that it is Thackeray chiefly who is responsible for our distaste, and not Life. That is to say, he has not dealt honestly with Life, with his own soul, or by us.

The lamentable pity of all this is that through all his work we are perpetually haunted by a sense of his genius. Few could be so lugubrious on occasion as he; yet, even when most lost to a sense of fitness and dignity, through his faults there flash continually on us strange lights in revelation of his genius. It is declared that as he wrote the famous chapter in *Vanity Fair* where Rawdon Crawley discovers Becky's faithlessness, the ejaculation broke from him, "Genius by God!" Who can help but approve the cause of his exclamation or fail to think of many other marked instances that could supply a cause not less sufficient? But the fact is, that even when we are least positive of the genius, we are most certain that we could not affirm its absence. It is this elusive charm about him that binds us to him even when we are most dissuaded by his unhealthy side-long glance at Life. Where, for example, can one discover a more delicate balance of style, a purer charm of expression, than his? Even when he left it most unchastened one can always divine the inner beauty beyond the excrescences. Where shall one know a more adequate or more natural conveyance of dialogue? Or where may we seek to find a more restrained dignity of deportment in his characters when occasion requires it? Take the scene already mentioned where Colonel Crawley finds Lord Steyne

with Becky, with, by way of instance, such a strangely contained and riveting sentence as, "And he struck the peer twice over the face with his open hand, and flung him bleeding to the ground." Take Esmond's repudiation of his Jacobite faith, his breaking of his Jacobite sword, before the face of the last Jacobite libertine, in *Henry Esmond*. Or the justly famous death of Colonel Newcome, with the wonderful last paragraph beginning "At the usual evening-hour the chapel bell began to toll." Their strength is in their restraint. Comparisons are invidious, but one is puzzled to think what Dickens would have made of such scenes.

What, then, is the cause of this dissatisfaction he so often stirs in us? Some have said that he is a cynic: others, that he is a sentimentalist. Is it possible to discover the central thing in him that shall explain these several, and seemingly contrarious, impressions his work leaves on various minds? For one thing, it should never be forgotten the manner of man he was. Objective art or subjective art, no man can write other than the things that are in him, and no man can help but write out the things that are in him. Thackeray was no exception to this. Firstly he was an Englishman; and, except for the fact that there was very little of the Falstaff in him, he might fitly be called a very typical Englishman.

That is to say, all those noble impulses that go to make the very loftiest art he was not only afraid of, he was half ashamed of them. Art is compact of nothing so much as the grand passions of the soul; and when those came upon Thackeray, he cast his eye hurriedly right and left to see what others thought of the figure he was cutting. He never knew anything of the grand abandon of the soul on fire. As has been said, he was afraid and ashamed of the divine fury the things he handled would awake in him: he sought refuge from it; and he found his refuge in only three possible retreats. Either he took refuge in a punctilious and meticulous rectitude: when he became a prig. Or he found shelter in a half-faltering scepticism at the expense of the genuineness of the passion awakened: when he promptly took shape as a cynic. Or he sought to baulk the passion of its urgency by turning half of it astray, and letting the lesser half of the stream filter maudlin-fashion down his page: when at once he was a sentimentalist.

Now, at one time or another, Thackeray is all of these things. Nothing can better test such a type of man than to give him Poetry to write or read. A blushing face, a smirking smile, and a stammering demeanour are the inevitable result: and the more genuine and potent the emotions stirred in him by

its appeal, the more marked and inevitable are these characteristics. And so it is with Thackeray. Take this verse he gives to his Jeames for the expression of his love—

“When moonlike o’er the hazure seas,
In soft effulgence swells,
When silver jews and balmy breeze
Bend down the Lily’s bells;
When calm and deep, the rosy sleep
Has lapt your soul in dreams,
R Hangeline! R lady mine!
Dost thou remember Jeames?”

How extraordinary it is! He cannot deny himself the impulsion to loveliness and beauty; but it suffuses him with blushes, and so he endeavours to turn it to burlesque. It is said of him that he ever blushed furiously as he penned his love-scenes. That can very well be believed. Probably he imagined himself being watched by some fellow-member of the Garrick Club.

The effect of this was all the more marked since he was possessed of so extraordinarily receptive a mind. There were few things that passed him that passed unperceived by him; and what he perceived, he analysed, criticised, and retained. Had he only possessed the god-like faculty of absolute abandon there is no telling what he might not have achieved. But this demands the instinct of faith and a healthy life. The man who said, “My vanity would be to

go through life as a gentleman, as a Major Pendennis," was obviously debarred from it. Not that he meant what he said, though it is evident that he meant a good deal of it. But that he should have said it was quite sufficient: for thereby he sought to deny the best in him.

Yet this very faculty, while it leads to the faults that have already been noticed, leads also to his one supreme excellence. Truly speaking, the more restrained he is, the more supreme he is. The avoidance of abandon that led to his cynicism, his desire for satire and caricature, his sentimentalism, his priggishness, led also, when instinct guided him aright, to the strength of restraint. In all the passages from his works that outstand as the memory's great landmarks, this is the virtue that characterises them all. And when he elected, not only to restrain his characters and his manner of narration, but also to restrain himself by the severe ordeal of subduing his hand and mind to the autobiographic narration of one of his own creations, why, then he mounted to his one perfect flower of achievement in *Henry Esmond*, and the wholly different, yet not less successful, *Barry Lyndon*. In both of them the showman is dismissed, and in the first of them at least the style has a certain grace of expression not to be outdone in or out of his work. Some have said that the affinity between the styles of the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries was proved in the fact that when Thackeray desired to achieve the earlier manner it was only necessary for him to chasten slightly his ordinary style, and make such slight conversational alterations as, for example, "'tis" for "it's." But this is not wholly so. The chastening of the style was due to the necessity of personal restraint. And, for the rest, he himself in life and spirit was always more attuned to the eighteenth century than to his own age.

Of his life we do not know much. Wisely, perhaps, he ordained that there should be no official biography of him. The completest hints we have yet had are to be found in the biographical introductions his daughter has supplied to the centenary edition. Yet these are written with what is, perhaps, a justifiably pious grace, rather than with a desire to let the utmost be known. From these, however, and from the friendly biographies already printed, a very accurate impression of the man and his life can be gathered. And it is even such a man, and even such a life, as one would have expected. It is almost the typical life of a man in the eighteenth century. A haunter of taverns and clubs, he might have been the associate of Steele and Addison rather than a liver in the nineteenth century. Thus it was that when he came to write *Henry Esmond* he had only to depict his own desires and emotions to achieve a

perfect verisimilitude. Yet it left its brand. Nature never blew through the eighteenth century: Nature never blew through Thackeray's life: Nature never blows through Thackeray's novels. They are of the town, towny; and a little stuffy withal.

There is always, therefore, a feeling of tragedy in reading the work which is his testimony for after-times. Unlike other workers in the Novel he is never sincerely himself just because he is always afraid of himself. There is power everywhere: but it is a power he is not willing to trust. There are always hints of beauty, in pure essence and in the delicate cadence of his style: but it is a beauty that makes him flush sensitively, and we are too often compelled to see it through cynicism or sentimentality, neither of which things belonged to his essential self. He paid the price of the Artist who was not content to be all Artist in the faith of the truth and ultimate value of his Art. He not only traded with the other camp he preferred to be considered of the other camp. Therefore, the power that was his went astray in the clouds that obscured its strength. Yet it wins through nevertheless; and it is impossible to read any portion of him without realising that here, if ever, was a man of genius, if he had only been content absolutely and fearlessly to trust that genius, and to dare it in the face of proprieties and smug conventionalities.

AN ASPECT OF SAMUEL BUTLER

IN spite of Mr. Shaw's eulogy in the introduction to *Major Barbara*, the works of Samuel Butler have still to receive that attention they deserve. We can scarcely imagine a Booklover worthy the name that does not hold in affectionate memory such books as his posthumous novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, or those two subtle and cutting satires *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*. To call Butler a refreshing genius would perhaps be to err. Refreshing he certainly was—though refreshing as a plunge in a frosty stream is refreshing, stripping much of sentimental nonsense out of one. But Butler's own philosophy obviates the use of the word genius. Yet if it be genius to see circumstances from a totally new standpoint; to throw new sharp crosslights that call into quick question much that custom in its lethargic way stoutly adheres to: if this be genius, then Butler was unquestionably a genius. He wrote, of course, much more than merely the three books already named. Indeed, his works wind out to a sufficiently lengthy list. But it is by the three named that he stands or falls; for they are not only far and away his best, but they comprise all his genuinely creative

work. They are books properly so called. His other works are more or less journeyman literature—uncreative, transient. Nevertheless, they all enshrine his particular philosophy. Carlyle, with colour and eloquence, aided by uncommon sagacity, waged mighty war on the world of humbug. Butler laughs at it. Sometimes his laughter comes near to being a withering scorn; but generally it is free of those bitter elements that bring him down to the measure of the things he mocks at. Generally he is above them, and his laughter is broad and free, sly at times if you will, exquisitely subtle and too remote for mere mirth at others, but perishing and deadly always. His was a surer way of exposing sham than was Carlyle's; withal, it was more cruel. Yet even Butler, despite his subtle and keen weapon was not always able to pierce between things that differ. In other words, he was wont sometimes to make mirth of things that were far from sham: Carlyle's method of general denunciation left him clear of so particular a charge.

• To the methods of satire all pretensions are lawful prey. Nor is it always possible to distinguish between pretensions that are justified and pretensions that are unjustified. Hence satire is apt to upcall some indignation that is meet and just, and the proper objects of its criticism know well how to escape in t

confusion so caused. So it is with Butler. Preternatural and supernatural are all of a piece to him too frequently; though often he flashes out a thought, such as his insistence of the wisdom of instinct as against mere reason, that lets us know he is not blind to the differences of the things he satirises. This confusion in Butler becomes confusion twice-confused in his disciple Mr. Shaw—for Mr. Shaw has avowed himself as in some measure a disciple. The high and mighty pretensions of the would-be romantic lover is anathema to Butler, but he does not ruthlessly sweep away all romance in love as does Mr. Shaw. In contradistinction to Mr. Shaw's attitude of impatient exclusion, Butler hangs aloof in wide tolerance, waiting to see the slightest display of unreality and pose; and then, but only then, out comes his laughter, playing above his subjects like summer lightning. He may perhaps mistake reality for unreality, sincerity for humbug. He sometimes does, but at least his intention is to divide between false and true. At his best Butler is inimitable. Not so cutting nor so broad, in the worst sense, as Swift, he has more sap and kindliness in him. He is even more original, and therefore more creative, than Swift, though he has by no means the brilliance of Swift. Who, in that great book *The Way of All Flesh*, has not been struck by his handling of the relationship between Ernest

Pontifex and his father? Ernest was his father's son. It was the irony of nature, for this was the sole perfunctory tie between them. There was no kinship between them; and neither could, by any conceivable force, have managed to love the other. Therefore, Butler refuses to recognise any tie or any obligation existing between them. How perfectly refreshing and free of all cant this is! Ernest himself did not see this at first, and until he did see it he and his father continued to cause each other untold misery. He was rather more his mother's son, and Butler recognises more of obligation existing there. But only in a lesser degree; that is, only in so far as any real kinship existed.

The Way of All Flesh is a great book; and in its genuine portrayal of real life lies the cause of its greatness. The two Erewhons are not so mighty, but they are even more original. To the latter of them Butler prefixes a quotation from the *Iliad*, which he translates thus—

"Him do I hate even as I hate Hell-fire,

Who says one thing, and hides another in his heart."

It is his purpose to smite this hypocrisy, and he does so by showing us a world of Topsy-Turveydom. In Erewhon nothing is as it is here. Moral defects are as illness with us, to be duly confessed, as a mere matter for the practitioner, who is called a Straightener.

Misfortune and illness, however, are deadly crimes. In an embezzlement, for instance, he whom we call a culprit is condoled with, and puts his case into the Straightener's hands for treatment; whereas the victim is abhorred and put straight into prison as a criminal. Poverty, smallpox, and phthisis were enormous crimes against the community, and were to be punished by terms of severe imprisonment or by death. The Erewhonians had no religion. They gave perfunctory attendance to Musical Banks, however; the coinage of which was absolutely valueless, though, of course, much displayed. The cashiers of these were "sinister-looking persons in black gowns"! Their injunctions were paid great heed to while the devotees (chiefly women, for the men seldom attended, though they were careful to join) were at the Banks. When they left, however, they followed the wholly different and contrary cult of Idgrun—a specious anagram for Grundy.

It is all delightful, and no less salutary. He escapes, at length, from Erewhon, with Arowhena, with whom he has fallen in love, in a balloon that he has made to his specifications for experimentation. Nevertheless, he longs to return to Erewhon, for it fascinated him, and, after twenty years, on the death of Arowhena, he does so. Now, however, to his horror, he finds himself worshipped by the whole

country as the Sunchild! The Musical Banks and Universities have taken him up. His balloon is transformed into a flaming chariot, and four storks that were very inquisitive over his ascent have become four black and white horses sent by his father, the Sun, to escort him back thither! Temples are erected to him everywhere, his manner of clothing adopted, and the two ~~men~~ that give themselves over to the exposition of his *Sayings*, most of which he fails to recognise, are Professors Hanky and Panky! In *Erewhon Revisited* there is at times a sadness most impressive that appears nowhere else in Butler's work. It is not so great as its predecessor, but it is warmer. The two of them, with *The Way of All Flesh*, have yet to bring Samuel Butler into his own. But they will do so, nevertheless, for Butler's name belongs to English literature.

THE VITALITY OF DRAMA

So sure is the present mind that we are on the eve, nay, already in the first flush of Dawn, of a great awakening in Drama, that it is well nigh to venture a platitude to refer to it. By this is meant, not that Drama shall be given more heed to by the people, which indeed might well be difficult of achievement if the attendance at all that now boasts itself under the wide name of Drama be remembered, but rather that Drama shall wear a new inspiration on its brow; that it shall cease to deck itself in tawdry and ribbons of a day outworn, but shall be vested in a clean sweet raiment but lately off the loom of inspiration. And this seems to make the present moment of peculiar interest in the light of the immediate past.

As one turns back, as far as one may legitimately turn back in a single review, two influences seem to stand out as pre-eminently full of disaster for the English stage. These two influences, while in some sense influences that sought only their expression in personalities, are better discovered and examined in the personalities who were their chief exponent and so their chief inspirers. These are Sir Henry Irving and Mr. George Bernard Shaw.

So great is the average Englishman's love of great names and picturesque personalities that it will seem a little ungracious to speak of Sir Henry Irving in this connection. And, indeed, it is largely this very thing that enables a man, if he have sufficiently large a personality, not only to arrest and atrophy the legitimate because vital development of the movement he represents, but also to start and establish a tradition to that effect, with irreparable results. The very measure of his personal success becomes the very measure of the failure of his cause—or rather, the cause that should be his. If in the intensity of his effort he fuse himself into the movement of his large unselfish love, then the cause will be swelled out and enriched by just so much as he himself is in might and stature. But if he tower above his work idiosyncratically, then he must increase, but the movement he represents will be everlastingly the poorer. The ethics of this, though fascinating enough, are not the present business. It now only suffices to say that the truer artist is he, who, when he comes as the herald of a new thing and finds this new thing expanding above him, can say, "It must increase, and I must decrease," and be content at that.

An excellent test of this is afforded. If an artist has enriched and ennobled his art, then his art will

in turn ensure his name and enshrine his personality. But if an artist has enfeebled and vitiated his art by the development of his idiosyncratic personality, then he must ensure himself, and by only one method. By the establishment of institutions and traditions. And therein lies his far-reaching effect of evil. For these institutions and traditions, even if they fail to perpetuate his name, nevertheless continue to vitiate the art of his profession, because it is the first law of their being to do so.

Of such institutions Sir Henry Irving established three that were noteworthy, though he did not originate them all. They were, Actor-managership, Single-part Plays, and Panoramic Scenery: each of which insidiously corrupted certain portions of Drama that were vital to its well-being; all of which have waxed more and more potent since the day of their establishment, until at this present moment, in that portion of Drama that may fitly be termed the Theatre of Commerce, they in their triune omnipotence have usurped the place of, and cast out the person of, authentic Drama.

I imagine were one to seek a definition of Drama that represented the general finding of thought, and yet contained the irreducible minimum of the opinion of all, it would shape itself in something of this fashion: A conflict of vital characters, either among

themselves primarily, or among themselves secondarily and with an external society primarily, interpreted by actors for the benefit of an audience. This does not enter into the general metaphysic of Drama, but assumes to be what all drama aims at being. Nor does it touch upon the mere empiric of Drama in questions of ideal fulfilment in fit representation. It merely says: excellent drama is an excellent fulfilment of these conditions; poor drama is a poor fulfilment of these conditions.

Now, this being so, the part that accessories have to play is set out with a sure and inevitable hand. And, moreover, what are accessories is discovered with equal swiftness as being all those adjuncts that lie outside the borders of the definition. This is to say, all that lies outside the borders of the definition is only of value in so far as it aids the interpretation of all that lies within; and then only within the severe limits of apt function; that is, never being permitted to exceed to such an extent that it intrudes and attracts attention to itself. Otherwise the action will most inevitably be encumbered in its movement; or may possibly even be strangled to extinction. All this may sound ruthlessly dogmatic. But purporting to be the irreducible minimum, it is only dogmatic as first principles are dogmatic.

In the light of this it will be profitable to examine

the three institutions referred to that Sir Henry Irving exemplified most fully in his practice, and which he established so surely that to this day they remain supreme in the vast majority of our drama. It will be well to start with the midmost, that is to say, the matter of Single-part Plays.

In the heyday of Irving's success the ardent playgoer did not pay pilgrimage to the Lyceum to see the drama *Faust*: he went to see Sir Henry Irving as Mephistopheles in a play whose title chanced to be *Faust*, but might well have been *Misalliance* for all that it mattered to him. How far Shakespeare was concerned in *Henry VIII.* did not concern him, and properly so; but whether or not it was a good play equally well did not concern him, and improperly so. But that Sir Henry acted as Cardinal Wolsey in such a play was to him all and in all. The Man's the thing wherein to catch the reason of the Play, seemed a fitting maxim for such a mood. Indeed, so ardent was this movement that it mattered little to the appreciative audience that Cardinal Wolsey was but little likely to have his gait, speech, and manner vital and quivering with the mannerisms of a man born some few centuries after his decease, unsubdued and unrestrained. And so has this tradition grown that we may at any moment find an actor, happening by chance not to have a play before the footlights,

compelling equally large and appreciative audiences at the variety theatre by repeating either plaintive or bombastic rhetoric before them!

The bearing of this on the definition we have accepted is obvious. How there can be any conflict of characters in an arrangement where one is underscored to vast predominance while all the rest are graciously and fittingly grouped round it, fails to appear. How there can be any clash of personalities (at least, that is to say, of such sufficient import as to draw a considerable number of people together in one place to view it) when one personality stalks highly and mightily through a host of comparative dwarfs, is another perplexity. The very basis of Drama is cut at. So much so that the mind pictures the actor declaring verse with fitting gesture before a music-hall audience as one who has boldly and fearlessly advanced to the logical conclusion of the movement.

This means two things. It means the debasing of pure emotion, which implies conflict, into weak sentiment, which implies maudlin opposition: a subject demanding subsequent and more detailed treatment. It means, too, that, since colour has been washed out of the vitality of character in this way, other and more adventitious aids must be employed to introduce colour. One such aid would be

furious movement and 'excitable by-play. Another leads us to the third of Sir Henry Irving's institutions, that of Panoramic Scenery.

It is inevitable that where panoramic scenery holds the boards strong acting must be dispensed with. In a recent and famous representation, for instance, of *The Merchant of Venice*, the first act was but simply staged in comparison to the others. The result was that the articulation of the words was clear, the gestures simple, the acting vibrant and strong. The whole act lives in one's memory as powerful. In a later scene the Ghetto was depicted with prodigal and elaborate scenic effect. The result was inevitable: for the acting was confused, strained, and turbulent; it was only when darkness fell over the scene, to blot out the nuisance of details, that anything like strength in acting was recovered. The scene lives chiefly in one's memory by virtue of a certain curious rippling of water cleverly contrived in a far-distant canal. And that this was all that concerned one's neighbours was unfortunately too patent. They were not to blame: for the mind refuses to contain two strong things at one time; and certainly it justly refuses to give predominance to acting when sumptuous and elaborate scenery demands primary attention by sheer magnificence. Thus an accessory, something clearly without the

bounds of our definition, something having nothing to do with Drama pure and simple, has thrust aside the conflict of characters and assumed priority of importance.

Nor is this all. For panoramic scenery has brought other evils in its train, two of which, at least, are vitally important. Take, for instance, Construction! Modern drama has decreed that for a three hours' entertainment three or four changes of scene only are permissible. More may be accepted, but will be looked askance at; less will be welcomed. In other words, a subsidiary movement shall at least last a whole hour without change of scene! In such a crude massing of movements what subtlety of construction can there be? And the pity of pities is, since construction of all others is the subtlest equipment of the dramatist. To write a whole play in one act, lasting an hour, is one thing: it is its own art, and has its own governing rules of beauty. But to write a play sufficiently lengthy to last three hours, and to compress it into three movements, is deliberately to forego some of the deftest adjustments of scene and psychology. But the difficulty of moving elaborate scenery many times in the time allotted has decided that it shall be so compressed.

Or take the question of Atmosphere! For a man in modern attire to step into a sumptuous modern

drawing-room and indulge in soliloquy strikes 'unnaturally, for all that we have all known it done, and, may be, under powerful stress of emotion, have done it ourselves. Yet most dramatists possess a secret love for soliloquy, and lament its elimination from drama. And they are right. For soliloquy is an unfurling of soul, which unfurling is the main business of drama. Conflict has awoken it; but the conflict need not be afoot at that moment. Much action is born in reflection; but modern drama does not allow for reflection. And surely it is more proper for a man to unfurl his soul in loneliness, than for him to do so in dialogue with his mortal foe! But for a man to stand in some perfectly simple scene with no atmosphere save such as he himself shall create, and then to indulge in soliloquy, what impropriety or unfitness is there in that? It is his words we hang on then, and they bring their own laws. In other words, Drama is creating its own conditions, and not having its conditions ruled out for it by accessory causes.

The same applies, for example, to such scenes as the last in *Hamlet*. This is objected to as a shambles. But would it be objected to as a shambles if the scenery was so simple, subtle, and remote of suggestion that the audience were induced to see men as gods contending rather than men as courtiers wrang-

ling? Indeed, the fact that so much of Shakespeare strikes one as violent when set in modern conditions is the severest indictment of modern conditions. They would not be violent if seen in the conditions for which they were written, and acted with vibrant simplicity and loftiness.¹

In fact, it is because of the elemental conditions of its setting that Shakespeare's drama is so vital; and it is because of these institutions that the type of drama under review now has been bled of all vitality. They have destroyed the only conditions under which pure emotion, and pure emotion in conflict, could exist; with the inevitable result that where emotion once reigned, sentimentality and froth are in querulous possession. Where great words (the basis of drama) once meant mighty emotion, they now too often mean only bombast. Nor could these two institutions referred to possibly have been maintained had it not been for Actor-managership. The native vitality of Drama, the most vital of all art-forms, would have burst them off had it not been for this incubus. The actor-manager decrees, and has the power to decree, that any play he accepts shall provide him with one noteworthy part, and that it shall be massed in construction.

¹ I may be forgiven perhaps for commenting that, since the above was written, I have worked this matter out with some attempt at care and fullness in my *Shakespeare; A Study*.

At this juncture Mr. Shaw came along—he being, in Mr. Arnold Bennett's elegant phrase, "The symbol of the whole shindy." In so far as Mr. Shaw destroyed the baneful influences that prevailed in Drama all about him he did doughty service indeed. Yet he did it in a curious way. For the baneful influences had resulted in turning the half of emotion out of character, leaving weak sentimentalism; so Mr. Shaw turned the other half out, leaving arid intellectualism. Which was lamentable; for it so happens that emotion in character is vitality in character. Character is the potentiality of emotion. Such emotion can only be directed into the sphere of practical operations through the agency of mind. If this mind be cultured and refined we speak of it as intellect. If it be not cultured we are content to speak of it merely as mind. But the important fact is that the point of collision in the impact between emotion and emotion is mind. Even in swordplay and fisticuffs it is so; but most manifestly is it so in that type of alert conflict with which drama has to do. So while mind seems to contend against mind, in reality it is not so; it is truly that emotion contends against emotion through the agency of mind.

That the point of conflict should be mind is important; but may well be over-important. It is

important as serving to show that the higher the mind the sharper the conflict. It may well be over-important when the author's bodiless intelligence in one utterance comes into conflict with the author's characterless intelligence in another utterance; when, in fact, one point of view opposes another point of view to maintain the semblance of a conflict, while character, the body of emotion, is everywhere lacking. In such a case the agencies of conflict are there indeed, and it may be in vivid and witty oppugnancy; but they are directing into the field of combat nothing but themselves. No emotion and characters appear there; only wit and titles. It is not conflict, but oppugnancy. It may be very entertaining; but can scarcely be called great Drama.

For example, two of the most influential emotions in mankind, the two most primal and potent, the two that recur most persistently in History and absorb Art, are perhaps Religion and Love. Not theology and erotic standards, which are their appearance in intellect after the impact of action; but the native emotions of Religion and Love. An important distinction appears here. For mind directed them into operation in the sphere of will; but mind also codified its experience in the sphere of intelligence.

Now it so happens that in one of Mr. Shaw's best plays its chief character professes to be actuated by

these two very emotions. Major Barbara professes to be swayed and ruled in the primary actions of her life by the forceful and unanswerable dictates of these two pure vitalities of character. And not only so. She professes to be their slave in their most illogical imperativeness. For Cusins, her betrothed (I was almost about to say "lover," except that that word strikes so preposterously across the facts of his course of action), is so wholly removed, both by social taste and by personal disposition, from Barbara's manner of life, seeming almost in some sense an adventurer, that to have chosen him for a life partner betokens in her an infatuation indeed. So for a young lady of society to take up with religious zealotry is scarcely the most common of experiences; but for such a lady to join the Salvation Army as an intense and active street propagandist, maintaining meanwhile her society life, is surely an uncommon case of religious fervour. These things are, however, the postulates of the play. But where does Barbara, in the action of the play, manifest either lover-like or any religious emotion? In other words, where does she demonstrate these to be the vital characteristics of a vital person? Who seeing her with Cusins would hazard any so wild and desperate a proposal as that she loved him? Who seeing her play the Major would imagine that Salvationism, let alone Christianity, had ever

touched emotion or zeal in her? Where does vitality swell out her part? The play is, of course, fascinating and arresting (it is by Mr. Shaw), but Barbara is no more than a postulate in a theme to be worked out. Yet this is not Drama; it is an argument fascinatingly conducted.

So with *Man and Superman*. John Tanner protests at the conclusion that he does indeed love Ann. We would like very much to believe him; but after all is said and done there seems very little reason why he should marry Ann rather than Ann's mother. The chase after him was all very exciting; nevertheless Ann herself is not very convincing. 'Ann is not Ann; Tanner is not Tanner (that is to say, they have not vital personalities behind their names to ring conviction on their actions); Ann and Tanner are rather postulates in the argument that Man cannot be Superman because he is for ever enmeshed in the nets of sex. It is another argument fascinatingly conducted under the conditions of Farce. But this is not vitality; this is ingenuity. Men and women do not contend in stressful action, striving for master in forceful will power; but conception oppugns conception, accepting as their law an end foreseen and aimed at. If it be Drama, then it is only Drama in a subsidiary sense.

Indeed, Mr. Shaw is trying to impose the conditions

of a new witty and intellectual Farce on the higher business of great Drama.

The end of all this could have been foreseen. For even as in *Man and Superman* the third act is in a sense the goal of the play, so *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* are the logical bent and intention of Mr. Shaw's development. In his earlier plays he preserved the pretence of action where the first rational cause of all action was lacking, vitality of character. The intellectual postulates went through all the semblance of potential and personal relationship; but the conditions were too full of unreality; they were annoying not less to their maker than to their hearers and readers. Therefore the conditions of potentiality had to be dropped, and static conditions adopted. In other words, *Getting Married* had to succeed to *Major Barbara*. His characters had not to combine the semblance of loving and struggling; they had but to state their argumentative point of view. Which was an admirable and manly admission of his limitations by Mr. Shaw. But, with the air so cleared, to claim for it the name of mighty Drama is surely somewhat egregious.

Sometimes to cast one's eyes backward is to cast one's eyes forward; and to cast one's eyes forward is to stand still. The future we do not know. Meanwhile the Past stands behind us full of lessons. The

Future is the realm of unlearned precept: the Past is stout and buxom with healthy practice. Or to translate this into dramatic example: problem plays are no new things; *Lear* was a problem play. But it was not a thesis play, which is all the difference in the world, for a thesis play is not a problem play (however loudly it claim it), since by very virtue of its propounding a thesis the problem was satisfactorily concluded in the author's mind before ever the play was entered upon. A problem play sets out the nature of the problem in the very personalities or agencies that constitute it, leaving them to contend according to the vital and stressful conditions of their own natures. The personality of the author does not intrude in the course of its action, though, it may before the action in the choice of his characters—except in the minor sense of human frailty, in an inability to express emotions outside the limits of his nature. The action is to proceed in the light of the sun, not in the limelight of the author's own mind. In this way a play is a problem as life is a problem, some fragment of life as seen by the dramatist's own radiant vision. All the conditions of the problem are there, sometimes in such poise and balance of contention as to confute all theorems set to fit it. But a thesis, being a thesis, deliberately sets aside some of the conditions and propounds a philosophy.

For example, compare, with all the inequality of comparison between a tragedy and a comedy, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Man and Superman*. Assuming that in the latter the prospective superman is tripped up in his pursuit of power by the subtle meshes of sex: we see it, perceive it, and, though the proposition may startle us and awaken thought, yet it leaves us no whit more touched than a proposition set verbally before us by apothegm or precept. But in seeing so mighty a man as Antony entrapped and brought to futility, pity is alive in us, the woe and calamity of it echo through our souls. Why? Because Antony lives for us. We see him struggling, loving, contending; we see Cleopatra: we know her for a woman, and perceive her in actual exercise of the eternal charm of her sex. We must love her too; and so our emotions are mingled, and sympathy brought nearer home to us. And when the catastrophe falls, and the man of mighty possibilities is spilt in the sands of futility, we are purged with pity and terror, as with awe and sorrow brought home to our very hearts. Actuality lives in it, burns in it, throbs through it. It is the sternest of realism: it is the only realism. It is actuality made tremendous. So-called and professing realism is gossamer and moonshine to it, without any of the weird beauty of gossamer and moonshine. And being actual, it is

vital. The only vitality is that of realism throbbing with emotion. Romeo calling for his Juliet echoes to the end of time with sheer and eternal reality, voicing the experience of all realists, that is, men of heart and experience.

Mr. Shaw has written against, and appealed against, Shakespeare. But he, more than any other man, is driving us back to Shakespeare (not the clipped and shorn Shakespeare of the Actor-manager). Shakespeare is not the end of all things. There is room for greater than Shakespeare. Shakespeare's mistakes, in character, faulty conception, loose structure, fustian and wasteful speech, are before us to learn from. But there seems small chance of learning so long as Mr. Shaw's plays stand across the future to prove that in Shakespeare vital men and women moved and contended (the only basis of true conflict) in contradistinction to Mr. Shaw's postulates in an argument (the basis of artificial opposition).

There is not only Shakespeare. There is Ibsen. The distinction between Ibsen and Shakespeare is one of species and degree; the difference between Mr. Shaw and Ibsen is one of genus and kind. Ibsen's characters may be, and are, vastly different to Shakespeare's; but each is a creator of living beings, that, being deployed in action, play out their own personalities. But the difference between *Man and*

Superman and *The Master Builder* is precisely this: that Hilda and Solness really do sway each other's destinies by the impact of real life on real life, whereas John Tanner and Ann step their measures like puppets to their author's bidding. In one we know Hilda and Solness; in the other we only see Mr. Shaw's somewhat sardonic philosophy.

There is also J. M. Synge. His characters may be disembodied souls, but they are real disembodied souls; the disembodied souls of intensely true and vital beings. It is at least not Synge we see everywhere, but souls of men and women. He does not weary us with iteration of himself. Nevertheless, Mr. Shaw, like J. M. Synge in his totally different way, has rendered Drama a considerable service above and beyond his onslaught on mere theatricality; and it is a service that only a vigorous mind could have achieved. He has taught us to give heed to the undeniable basis of all great Drama: Words. He, too, has taught us to hear, and, through hearing, to see more than the eye can give us.

THE END

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